

“Craniumintrarectumitis” – A common Managers’ ailment

In today’s hectic marketplace, the busy manager often suffers from a common ailment known as “craniumintrarectumitis”. This condition causes managers to be always seemingly very busy, with little time for members of the team. This can be due to either being stuck with their nose in front of spreadsheets and reports, or trapped in endless, meaningless meetings. The condition can result in irrational behaviour, weight gain, irritability, loss of temper, and general malaise.

But the manager is not alone and a recent report published in the Harvard Business Review in February 2002 states:

“Fully, 90% of managers squander their time in all sorts of ineffective activities. A mere 10% of managers spend their time in a committed, purposeful and reflective manner”

(“Beware the Busy Manager” – Heike Bruch & Sumantra Ghoshal
Harvard Business Review February 2002)

In my experience both as a manager and as a management coach I find this to be very true, and as a result of reviewing my own experience and interviewing pharma managers, I have found the main causes of this condition.

1. The manager’s inability to plan effectively resulting in e-mail/voicemail overloads and deadlines for reports being missed. In other words the manager’s lack of being able to prioritise what is important as opposed to not important.
2. The manager’s inability to influence senior management, resulting in the manager performing tasks that they think the senior management wants them to do, or, simply carrying out senior management orders despite the fact that the manager on the receiving end thinks the orders are inappropriate. This could mean attendance at non-essential meetings, irrelevant reports or inappropriate project work.
3. The manager’s belief system that says that working with projects and/or senior management /marketing is more important than working with individuals in the team. This creates a division between the team and the manager as the team feels under-valued and left out. This can mean that members of the team are not willing to come forward to take on extra work with the end result being that the manager has to do them.
4. The manager’s lack of capability in leading a team effectively, particularly in the skill of delegation.

So how does one treat this ailment so as the condition does not become terminal? The following is a five-step course of treatment can be taken not only to alleviate the symptoms, but also to actually treat the underlying causes.

1. Get the manager to take time out and take stock of the situation. A good senior manager or coach will support the manager to identify where he or she is under pressure. Where are they spending their time? What are the real priorities? How can they change their habits?
2. Once the priorities have been identified, the manager must be able to plan more effectively and have the capability and resolve to ensure the plan is put in place and is reviewed regularly. Again a senior manager or coach should support the manager in achieving this.
3. Once they have taken stock and put a plan into place then the next step of the treatment is to communicate the plan and its contents to both senior management and the team in order to manage everyone's expectations as this plan will probably mean a change in the manager's behaviours. The manager will have to contract with senior management and the team as to what will be different from now on. (This takes courage and good feedback skills as it may mean not attending meetings or it could mean challenging the production of meaningless reports!)
4. The next step is to get buy-in from the team and to identify within the team those individuals, who are capable or potentially have the capability, to take on some of the manager's tasks. This will not only free up some of the manager's time but it will also give those capable individuals in the team that much needed extra "challenge" that should ensure they remain motivated and committed.
5. The final stage of the treatment is to ensure that regular review of the new plan and its objectives happens on a regular basis. Without this review how can the manager know whether or not the treatment is working? The manager should be doing a self-analysis and also getting feedback from the team and superiors, to check that signs of the condition are not re-appearing.

Take the full course of treatment and do regular check-ups and you will find that the common condition of "craniumintraeectumitis" can be treated successfully and also be kept at bay forever.

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