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Better Life Lab Creates Ways to Work Smarter

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) January 30, 2018



Are you feeling stressed? Unmotivated, listless and unable to do anything creative at work?

It's not just you. Brigid Schulte, director of the Better Life Lab, reports seven out of 10 people are feeling overwhelmed, stressed and burned out. And it's making people sick. [Chronic stress](#) is linked to the six leading causes of death.

"The health costs from stress-related physical and mental health issues rival diabetes," Schulte says.

Though this is a national trend, it is amplified in the newsroom, where you're only as good as the content you produce.

Schulte comes from a journalism background, with over 25 years in the industry. She's weathered lots of changes—including the dawn of Google. "I have no idea how we did our research before," she laughs. "Technology has made our jobs easier and faster. There's a lot of positive about it."

She admits the 24/7 connection to technology is incredibly important when working on a breaking story. "But the problem is, we're not always working on that breaking story. In newsrooms now, it's as if we're all firefighters and it's always a life or death situation."

Not every story requires that last-minute rush—and the longer we're in 'emergency mode,' the more the work suffers.

"It literally makes us stupid," Schulte says. "We make more mistakes." [A study found that](#) young medical residents who are sleep-deprived made more mistakes. In news, it is imperative to get as many facts right as you can, and when you're delirious from being tired or burned out, you're more mistake-prone. It becomes difficult to make the right decisions and to double-check yourself.

In journalism, these mistakes can manifest in lack of fact checking or simple errors.

Schulte is a recovering workaholic—she admits drinking the Kool-Aid in the past and her work suffered from it. She says after a certain amount of time [without a break], workers are just "butts in chairs." So what can be done?

In newsrooms, it's all about the best story, whether it's first, deepest or most creative, so you really need to be on your A-game. In many American newsrooms, there is still a cultural phenomenon that if you're there late, come in early and eat lunch at your desk, that somehow you are better. This is a throwback to the industrial boom, where you could easily measure someone's work by the hours they put in.

"Sometimes it can be very difficult to separate perception from reality of what you're actually producing," she says.

On the individual level, she recommends having continual conversations with managers about what is expected, and then really tracking what you're doing.

On the managerial level, she wants to see a change in focus away from long hours and presence—especially when reporters should be out in the field. "The best reporter is not the one sitting there at 11 o'clock at night," she says. "You have to find what are the metrics you can realistically use to evaluate someone."



Kirsten Ballard



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