People who feel a need to be high achievers often fall short of high achievement. They may be the smartest, most talented people in the workforce. And yet their anxieties often get the best of them and, as a result, they underperform, according to Thomas DeLong, the Philip J. Stomberg Professor of Management Practice in the Organizational Behavior area at the Harvard Business School and author of *Flying Without a Net: Turn Fear of Change into Fuel for Success*. He will discuss why it happens and what can be done about it.

Click here to register for:

*Flying Without a Net: Turn Fear of Change into Fuel for Success*

**Monday, May 4, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.**
Campus Center Odeum

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Driving Lessons for Driven Employees

Many employees who are driven operate erratically, lose their direction and see their careers stall.

Thomas DeLong, a Harvard Business School professor, and former chief development officer and managing director of Morgan Stanley Group, will explain why employees who are driven often fail to perform to their highest capabilities and what they can do about it during, “*Flying Without a Net: Turn Fear of Change into Fuel for Success,*” a Special Webinar Series webinar to be held at 12:30 p.m. on May 5, 2015. To register, click here.

Based on his research, DeLong says many people who are achievement-oriented focus on “busyness” instead of business, filling their days with too many meetings and too much email.

“If you give that person all those things to do,” according to DeLong, “the emotion it evokes is ongoing guilt, because no matter how much they try to accomplish everything, there is never enough time. The agenda gets bigger and bigger, and longer and longer, which creates anxiety. That's the pattern.”

But the “busyness” is a charade, used to cover up the person's need for inclusion, purpose, and significance when his or her career is not progressing according to plan.

“We first try to look and feel busy in order to prove to a boss that, despite misgivings and criticism, we are dedicated and productive,” DeLong says. “We make a great show of working late or coming in early to convince people that, although we may not fit an organization’s needs, we take our job seriously.”

Such individuals can be found in office buildings throughout America checking their mobile phones constantly when they're not on their computers or tablets. They walk fast, talk fast, and create the impression that they have a purpose. During conversations, they make a show of listening, but seem to be counting the seconds until they can move on to their next activity. They are often experts in technology and think others will judge them based solely on
how smart they are, but they have not developed the business skills they need to succeed.

Such individuals, ironically, want promotions, yet they fear change, DeLong says. They want autonomy, yet they also want to be involved and they thrive on positive feedback. They are often impatient with others, yet they try the patience of their co-workers.

The roots of their anxiety include the fear of being wrong, the lack of a sense of purpose, and a craving for human connection. To relieve their anxiety, they adopt destructive behavior, including busyness, comparing themselves to others, and blaming others for their frustration.

**Strength from Vulnerability**

But there is hope for these would-be high achievers. By following three steps, DeLong believes those who aim high can achieve high.

**Step One: Be Self-Aware.**

The first step toward realizing your true potential, according to DeLong, is to become more self-aware.

“Ask yourself, ‘How am I motivated?’ ‘What do I value?’ ‘How do I behave when I get angry?’ When you can answer those questions, you will have situational awareness,” he says. “Then ask yourself, ‘How do I respond to others?’ ‘How well do I read a particular situation?’ As answers to those questions hit against each other, you will have self-regulation. Then ask, ‘Do I have the ability in real time to adapt, to adjust to be true to who I am, and to leverage the situation?’ ”

People need to understand that it’s not just what they accomplish that’s important, DeLong says. Other things they should consider important include what they learn on any day, how they can help someone else, and whether they have had the honest conversations they need to have.

“It’s much more of a holistic approach,” he says, “as opposed to being one dimensional.”

**Step Two: Seek Support.**

Once self-awareness is achieved, a person is in a better position to work with and seek the support of others.

People who are driven “are reluctant to ask for help, because of the implications of doing so,” according to DeLong. “If I go to you for help, it’s like saying you’re smarter than I am, that I should know this answer, and maybe not knowing it is going to affect my career.”

They fear making themselves even more vulnerable by committing mistakes while learning something new, but they need to “draw strength from vulnerability,” according to DeLong. They can do so by accepting that they need to first “do the right things poorly” before “doing the right things well.”

**Step Three: Disrupt the Pattern.**

The final step is to take an objective look at how you do your job now and at how you might do it differently. For example, many achievement-oriented employees need to learn to delegate.

“On the whole,” DeLong says, “technical people aren’t the best delegators, because to delegate means you need to stop and teach, and that slows down the process. They say, ‘I don’t have the time, so I’ll just do it myself.’ It’s counter-productive.”

For skilled technical employees to learn to manage and lead, DeLong says, they need to get past the producer-manager dilemma.

“The producer-manager dilemma is something the professional has to manage every single day,” according to DeLong. “What do I mean by that? The technical individual, when you put pressure on them, nine times out of 10 will focus on the task at hand, not on relationships. To manage, a person needs to learn to focus on relationships.”

Just as employees who are driven need to seek support, employers also need to provide them with support and help them to succeed.

“The speed of change creates difficulties,” DeLong says. “What worries me the most is that organizations aren’t allowing individuals to take prudent risks to learn. They’re cost conscious, so they’re saying, ‘You need to do it right the first time,’ but at the same time they’re saying, ‘we want you to be innovative.’ We’ve become sensitized to the way it’s done.”

On the whole, though, it comes down to the individual employee, according to DeLong. Driven employees who are willing to make a few adjustments can shift their careers back in gear.