

KEEPING MANAGERS HEALTHY

By a Financial Times Correspondent

DO'S AND DON'T'S FOR EXECUTIVES

1. Don't travel too often or too far.
2. Have at least one week's clear break in the middle of long tours.
3. Never fly both ways on a business journey.
4. If possible, come home part of the way by boat. If not, have three or four days at home before going to the office.
5. Never travel over week-ends except for pleasure and then never more than 100 miles.
6. Keep your week-ends completely to yourself.
7. Cultivate outside interests and hobbies.
8. Try and take some physical exercise—gardening and fishing recommended.
9. Have a medical check-up every two years until the age of 50, and then every year.
10. Learn to relax.

THE current preoccupation with the effects of stress and strain on top-level executives stems partly from American attitudes towards the problem of health in business and partly from a more general concentration—now almost international—on business as a full-time job, absorbing the hours after work, taking up week-ends and encroaching on holidays. A number of international companies in this country which, by virtue of their organisation and tradition, make substantial calls on their executives' time and energy, reckon that the matter is vitally important.

Few of them lay down firm rules for what executives should do to minimise personal wear-and-tear or how they should spend their leisure hours. But they do offer advice to their executives and the table of do's and don'ts is compiled partly from what one oil company advises its men and partly from the observations and practices of other companies. The suggestions are mostly self-evident, but companies believe that fewer than one in ten executives could say that they carry out even half these recommendations.

There seems to be two main reasons for this. One company doctor who has been observing executives and their reactions to their work for several years now says that top executives generally have a better-than-average bill of health—or else they would not get to the top. This advantage enables them to work longer and harder without showing undue signs of strain.

Worst Enemy

THE second reason seems more directly pertinent to the whole problem. The same doctor maintains that a man's company training is frequently his own worst enemy. He is taught at an early age to be precise, to undertake personally as many things as he can, and not to get juniors to deputise for him at minor conferences and social functions whose business importance is marginal. By the time a man comes to assume high responsi-

bilities at the age of 45 or 50, these principles are too deeply embedded to be thrown off. Numbers of executives, therefore, find that they are on their feet until 10 or 11 o'clock three or four night a week or that they take papers home and work on them until the early hours.

Travelling's Toll

BUT undoubtedly the most wearing aspect of any executive's work is travelling. Not only is flying physically tiring, but environmental and climatic changes (particularly the latter) together with a 14- or 15-hour day of meeting people, attending conferences, and going to social functions produce the severest stresses which even the most hardened businessman cannot avoid. Most companies encourage their executives to return by boat from these kinds of tour, but the number of cases where an executive does not feel it is a matter of urgency to present his report is comparatively rare.

Some companies produce enough evidence to show that their executives cannot avoid strenuous after-hours work and from preference frequently choose not to rest after or during travel. (Executives find that this is the hardest rule of all to obey and seem almost invariably compelled to get back to the office as soon as possible, although the company would prefer them to have a rest.)

One company executive finds that on average he works two and a-half nights a week. He may have to attend a conference, a cocktail party, or meet men from abroad whom he sometimes entertains to dinner. He travels two months of the year. "I think I find it hard to get business out of my mind during my free evenings in the week," he says, "although I do manage it at the week-end. I don't think I could delegate my social commitments to any of my juniors although I frequently feel I would like to."

He has no specific hobbies—something which the doctors recommend—largely because he cannot find the time for them. He has, however, enough interests to keep him occupied during retirement. He is exceptional in that he has a medical check-up about once a year—voluntarily—although his colleagues have to be coaxed. According to the table of rules, he scores about 30 per cent.

Tribute to Constitution

SUCH is the set-up of many of the international companies that the executives' problems do not look like being relieved by any of the measures which the companies themselves suggest. These are problems which seem to be inherent in companies with extensive international ramifications. The fact that on the whole most of their executives look as healthy as they do is

largely a tribute to their constitutions and physical and mental make-up. The higher a man rises the greater the stress is likely to become. And at the moment none of the big companies seems to have found the answer to keeping this stress down to the minimum.

The importance of a regular physical check-up seems hard to overstate. A number of companies automatically examine their executives who return from overseas and some of them would like these examinations to be made compulsory for their men in this country. Executives rarely make a voluntary appearance in front of their company doctors and when they do it is more often than not at the prompting of their wives.

But whether it would be desirable to make such check-ups compulsory is another matter. One company doctor finds that executives are on the whole ignorant of medical matters and have to be handled tactfully when it comes to examining them. There is a chance that a healthy executive might be accidentally encouraged to take the wrong kind of interest in his health and thus become subject to unfounded neurotic worries. One oil company, however, manages to screen most of its executives fairly regularly and to get them before a doctor for a thorough overhaul at periodic intervals.

Ideal Holiday Period

CLOSELY allied to personal health problems is the importance of the holiday period as a relaxation from worry. Doctors as well as executives seem to be agreed that the ideal period for a holiday is three weeks—the first week virtually being used as a time for "unwinding."

Although ideal in theory, there seems to be plenty of evidence to show that executives take their holidays in two halves or piecemeal, while a number of them break the most important rule of all—which is not to "keep in touch" with the company while ostensibly on holiday. All companies seem to be most insistent that their executives take their full holiday quotas.

Uranium is Big Business