



What's Work Got To Do With It? Intro Episode

Guest: Dede Montgomery, M.S., C.I.H.

Host: Dr. Anjali Rameshbabu, Ph.D.

Helen Schuckers: [00:00](#)

Did you know that we spend a third of our lives at work? It's no wonder that our work experiences can affect our well-being, so what's work got to do with it? We invite you into the conversation as we discuss questions like, how do work hours affect your health? How can your workplace culture help you stay safe on the job? Is your supervisor supportive when you need to take time off to care for your loved ones? We'll dig into some of the science behind the biological impact of our environment, how conditions like work hours, occupational stress, and workplace safety affect our health, and what we can do to prevent negative effects and promote well-being. The mission of the Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences is to improve the lives of workers through biomedical and occupational health research. We explore a range of questions with regard to work-related injury and disease and develop evidence-based strategies to prevent these negative outcomes and improve the health of workers.

Our guest today is Dede Montgomery. Dede is the Outreach Director for the Institute, as well as the Oregon Healthy Workforce Center, a federally funded research center. As part of her role, she connects actively with stakeholders in the Pacific Northwest and beyond, educates various audiences on occupational health, safety, and well-being, and provides technical expertise to the Toxicology and Occupational Health Information Center at the Institute. Dede also manages our social media channels and blog, Oregon and the Workplace. Apart from her work at the Institute, she is the chair of O[yes], Oregon Young Employee Safety Coalition. In her spare time, she's an ardent Oregonian, and has recently published a book called My Music Man. Dede has a Master of Science in Public Health and is currently a Certified Industrial Hygienist.

Anjali Rameshbabu: [01:48](#)

Dede, thank you for joining us. We are so excited to have you here on our very first episode of this podcast, and we look forward to sharing more about what we do here at the Institute and how

we're trying to improve the safety, health, and well-being of workers in Oregon and beyond. We do this through a combination of research, education, and outreach, well, like this podcast. Let's start with something basic. Right? Why should we care about our working conditions, or factors like work-life balance or organizational culture? What does work have to do with our life?

Dede Montgomery: [02:20](#)

Most of us know intuitively, and now we're learning through research, that the culture at work, the work that we do, it directly influences how we feel. Feelings of being unsafe or unsupported at work affect our own physical and our emotional health, as well as how well we do at work, our own productivity, and even sometimes our desire to continue to work at a job or within a certain company. It also really has spillover effect to our families and the communities we live in.

Anjali Rameshbabu: [02:57](#)

That's great. That's really, I think, a really great way to bring together how work and life all come together really in one really close circle. Our podcast is part of the Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences here at OHSU. Could you tell our listeners what we do here?

Dede Montgomery: [03:15](#)

Well, the mission here at the Institute, or what we sometimes refer to as OccHealthSci, is to improve the lives of workers. We do this through what we might call biomedical research, as well as occupational research. All of that research is either at the very basic level, or what we call sometimes applied, where often we're out in workplaces or at organizations. We also do both outreach and education as we want to take what we know and learn through research and translate it into perhaps toolkits, as well as into educational opportunities. We have scientists that are researching biological mechanisms such as, perhaps, how interruptions in our sleep may be linked to disease, or how we might be able to protect ourselves from agents that harm our genetic makeup. We also have scientists, as I mentioned, working with organizations to better understand, for example, how healthier supervision or supportive organizational culture and practices affects both our safety and our well-being at work and sometimes outside of work.

Anjali Rameshbabu: [04:34](#)

It's really, at the Institute, we look at the whole spectrum of how some, the biomedical mechanisms of how work impacts health and safety, but also, we look at some solutions of how we can address them. Within the Institute, you are also part of the Oregon Healthy Workforce Center, and the Center is looking into the concept of Total Worker Health. What is Total Worker Health, and how does it tie together our work and home lives?

- Dede Montgomery:** [04:58](#) Total Worker Health helps us really better integrate the way organizations can support safety, health, and well-being of all of us at work by facilitating the integration of our own resources and programs. It helps to design ways to do things better and to better, to really more effectively use resources or even identify resources that maybe we should have that better support that whole worker. Really, it does it in a way that helps look at the impact that our lives outside of work, which make up many hours of the day, also influence our ability to be at work in our best self.
- Anjali Rameshbabu:** [05:43](#) So it's more about how organizations can help make the lives of employees better, right, at work and at home. What's an example of how an organization can provide, what kind of resource can they provide and help employees?
- Dede Montgomery:** [05:56](#) We might be able to enhance our healthier practices, such as diet or exercise, by creating supportive structures, or perhaps encouraging that at work. More challenging ways might be, for example, when we start to look at sleep, and we're examining our own expectations for work shifts, and such as night shift or long overtime, and really trying to help put together both policies that best protect workers during those work hours, as well as encouraging education and understanding about, in that example, why sleep is important and how we can facilitate better sleep. It's really taking both the organizational model and the impact that we can make through organizations by sharing those safety practices and healthy practices with encouragement for personal change.
- Anjali Rameshbabu:** [07:03](#) Right, so by helping organizations understand this link between work and life, we can help them come up with solutions like making little changes, like having different work shifts, or having fewer night shifts, if that's possible, or coming up with some ways to design the workplace to make it friendlier and healthier for the worker. The Oregon Healthy Workforce Center does research and development on this concept of Total Worker Health, and we design programs to help organizations employees be safe and well. For example, we have our COMPASS program, which helps home care workers improve peer support resources, reduce their risk of injury, and promote health. One of our ongoing studies is called the Active Workplace Study, where we're investigating whether this Total Worker Health approach can help reduce sedentary behavior among call center workers and improve workplace culture.
- Anjali Rameshbabu:** [07:53](#) We will wait for that for another podcast, and we'll cover more about the tools and toolkits that we have at the Center. Dede, thank you so much for taking us through all the work we do here to help workers stay safe and healthy on the job and at home. We

have to ask, why do you do this? Right? What's the most rewarding part of your work?

Dede Montgomery: [08:11](#)

Thank you, Anjali, for asking. As a safety and health professional and an industrial hygienist, I really appreciate how my profession has evolved over the last couple decades to recognize more holistically the many different factors that impact worker health and safety. A big part of this is really the challenge and satisfaction of working together with those from different disciplines, so that would be very rewarding, but really, in the end, for me, the most rewarding part of my job today, just as it probably was 30 years ago, is the opportunity to interact with so many different people from many different industries who really are all trying to make a positive difference to people's lives. I feel lucky to be able to work in my profession, and thank you for the opportunity today.

Anjali Rameshbabu: [09:04](#)

Yeah. Of course, and this is a really great example of how our work can make us happy and bring it home to life, right? All right, thank you so much for joining us today and for taking us through Total Worker Health, the work we do at the Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences, and the Oregon Healthy Workforce Center.

Helen Schuckers: [09:22](#)

You're listening to "What's work got to do with it," your go-to resource on all things workplace, safety, health, and well-being. We want to hear from you on workplace topics that you would like to discuss. Email us at occhealthsci@ohsu.edu. Subscribe to our Oregon and the Workplace blog or follow us on social media at facebook.com/occhealthsci.ohsu or on Twitter [@OHSUOccHealth](https://twitter.com/OHSUOccHealth) to stay updated on current research, resources, news, and community events. This podcast is a production of the Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences and is hosted and directed by Helen Schuckers, Sam Greenspan, and Anjali Rameshbabu. Thanks for tuning in.

