

Under Pressure – Coping with Workplace Stress

“The past and future are both things I don't like to stress about because the past can't be changed. And the future is too random to predict.” - Chae Richardson

It's difficult to argue the inherent wisdom in the above quote. Putting it into a practice is the challenge, and unless you have “Guru - Self-actualized and Transcendent” on your business card, stress can and probably has blindsided you at one time or another. Unfortunately, stress is an unavoidable fact of life for most, if not all, human beings.

While we may (to varying degrees) have some freedom in the type of work we choose, the need to be employed is not something most can cast aside for a little rest and relaxation when under stress. So if we accept that stress is simply a fact of life, then how can we best cope with it? As stress accumulates, how do we resist the urge to curl up in a fetal position and give up, or hold our tongue as an employee, client or colleague does a masterful job of pushing every one of our buttons? Fortunately,



there are methods of reducing or coping with workplace stress that both companies and individuals can adopt.

The first step in dealing with stress is to determine which stressors are unchangeable and which can realistically be eliminated. Unpredictable deadlines, stress resulting from miscommunication, uncertainty with regards to role expectations or even job security are matters that can be dealt with effectively. Management and employees can (and should) work together to resolve these issues. And by eliminating non-

essential stressors, employees can reduce the cumulative stress factor, which often becomes overwhelming to the individual and costly to the company.

Here are some of other strategies to deal with stress:

- ❖ **Change perspective:** Whenever possible, view a problem as a challenge, rather than a cause for worry or distress. Try viewing a current concern as though you were an objective third party offering someone advice. By removing overwhelming emotions from the equation, solutions will often present themselves more readily. And if there's anything your logical mind enjoys, it's solving complex puzzles.
- ❖ **Create an ergonomic workspace:** Poor workplace ergonomics are known to result in a multitude of physical ailments such as tired or irritated eyes, headaches, sore muscles and a stiff neck, which can contribute to stress levels. Fortunately, an ergonomic workspace can be achieved for little or no cost. A quick search online will yield a wealth of information on recommended table and chair heights, lighting, proper sitting and typing techniques, and even simple yoga exercises that can be done while seated at your workstation. Don't worry - yoga pants and bare feet are not required.

- ❖ **Reduce role and task ambiguity.** When you don't know which task is to be done by whom and by when, it can obviously be stressful if not confusing. To avoid this, a person's skills and abilities should match a clearly defined, consistent set of role expectations. Provide your employees with clear task descriptions for their position and specification for their tasks and projects. And make sure that you are available for consultation and question.
- ❖ **Retain a sense of humor.** To quote novelist and author Kurt Vonnegut, "Laughter and tears are both responses to frustration and exhaustion. I myself prefer to laugh since there is less cleaning up to do afterward."

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There are healthy and unhealthy techniques for dealing with stress, and **PsychTests' COSA (Coping Skills Assessment)** can help pinpoint the bad ones and help educate employees on the good ones. Let's face it – curling up under your desk or letting loose a string of colorful language will feel really good on the spot, but there will probably be repercussions. And if the stress levels in your office appear to have escalated, PsychTests' Burnout tests for service and non-service industries can pinpoint employees who may be in need of advice and education on dealing with stress. ☘

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