

Dealing with Work Stress

"Brain cells create ideas.
Stress kills brain cells.
Stress is not a good idea."
... Doug Hall

It has been widely believed that the most stressful jobs are those in the IT, nursing care, education, secretarial, and service industries. There are also surveys that included lawyers, engineers, marketers, and human resource personnel among the most stressed professionals. Is it true that if you are in these professions, you must necessarily feel stressful at work? Can there not be occupational stress in other types of jobs? While external factors heighten our anxiety and responses, we should accept that how we perceive and deal with these factors will determine the final stress level in us.

With the right techniques, we can cope and manage stress even in these so-called stressful occupations.

I will tell you a story about The Ass and The Mule

A Muleteer set forth on a journey, driving before him an Ass and a Mule, both well laden. The Ass, as long as he traveled along the plain, carried his load with ease, but when he began to ascend the steep path of the mountain, felt his load to be more than he could bear. He entreated his companion to relieve him of a small portion, that he might carry home the rest; but the Mule paid no attention to the request.

The Ass shortly afterwards fell down dead under his burden. Not knowing what else to do in so wild a region, the Muleteer placed upon the Mule the load carried by the Ass in addition to his own, and at the top of all placed the hide of the Ass, after he had skinned him.

The Mule, groaning beneath his heavy burden, said to himself: "I am treated according to my deserts. If I had only been willing to assist the Ass a little in his need, I should not now be bearing, together with his burden, himself as well."

Moral:

Cooperate or suffer the penalties. The strong should help the weak.

In real life



We think that humans have a phenomenal threshold in handling work volumes. Often, it is not the huge workload that causes stress, but the various factors relating to the work. Some of the factors are:

1. Lack of control over the way the work is done.

Consider two different management styles.

Manager A watches the clock, the staff have to arrive in office by 9 a.m. and leave only after 5 p.m. with a break in between, not exceeding an hour. The work processes are all laid out in writing, and every member of the company has to adhere strictly to the procedures. Any change in the procedures has to be cleared by several levels of management and approved ultimately by the boss. There are security cameras everywhere and phone calls in the office are monitored.

Manager B gives the staff more autonomy in carrying out their duties. The staff are to work a minimum of 7 hours a day. However, they may start or end work anytime, a gesture much appreciated by the parents who have to attend to family needs as well. Each staff member is well-briefed on his or her scope of duties and understands fully how these duties fit into the overall scheme of things. The company encourages staff to come up with new and better ways of getting the jobs done. In fact, the company rewards staff for creative and innovative ideas.

Quite naturally, the staff under Manager A will feel stifled, oppressed, frustrated and depressed. They may bring their unhappiness home and the family members suffer with them.

Conversely, the staff in Manager B's team will be more motivated to get their jobs done well. They are happy at work and might be amenable to taking on heavier workloads.

2. Unreasonable deadlines.

Granted that the company's clients determine when they want the products or services to be delivered to them. It is however the management of the company that assigns the job to the employees.

The tendency of the management is to give it to the most efficient and trusted employee. They fail to consider the number of projects the employee has already undertaken, or the deadlines of these projects. There are only 24 hours in a day,

and when the employee is swarmed with all the deadlines coming up one after another, the stress level invariably goes up.

For employees who suffer stress caused by deadlines, the best solution is to prioritize the work. Bear in mind that good performance is not necessarily in doing everything well, but in doing the important things well.

3. Unachievable targets.

Setting too high a [goal and performance target](#) may lead to the undesirable result of increased stress in the team members.

4. Unfair treatment.

We do not doubt that in human relationship, there is bound to be nepotism and favoritism. Bosses who have close relations with or show fondness for particular staff is unlikely to want that staff to be miserable in office. This staff may receive a lighter workload, lesser responsibilities, nicer workstation, and better appraisals. All these are normally done at the expense of other colleagues who have to cover this staff's duties

with no additional rewards or benefits. No prizes for guessing how these colleagues feel.

5. Unpleasant work environment.

Other than human factors, the work environment plays a big part too. Any of these could add to the stress an employee feels at work – too cold or too warm an office; insufficient working space; lack of essential stationery or equipment; noisy environment; improper lighting; sick building and poor ventilation; long walk to washroom; odd seating arrangements.

The key to survival in a work setting is good stress management.

If you want to be good with yourself, here are a couple of tips for anyone who is stressed by work

1. Take time away from the cause of stress.

Remove yourself temporarily from the environment. Take a short break or time off to free your mind from the pressure or tension. Stroll along the beach, listen to your favorite music, meditate or pray. When you return, you are usually able to look at the issues from a fresh perspective.

2. Talk to people and seek help.

During your time off, confide in family members, friends or colleagues. They may have experienced the same problems you are facing and are able to share their approaches in tackling the problems. If you do not like to talk, use the time to surf the web, read and research. Somewhere out there, someone may have the solutions you are looking for.

3. Eat well and sleep soundly.

The cliché goes, “A hungry man is an angry man.” Have a good meal and get a good sleep. When you awake the next day, the problem miraculously seems small or different or may even disappear from your thoughts altogether. Of course, it is a perception, but a clearer mind can think of better solutions.

4. Focus and act.

Pointing fingers and putting blame may ease your conscience. Although you feel better if you push all the blame to somebody, it does not move things along. Problems have occurred, and your task should be to find solutions to the problems. Thinking alone is also not enough. Once you have in mind the approach, you should carry it out and act on it.

5. Accept stress as a part of life.

When you are suffering from stress, a likely question you ask is “Why me?” Some people may be so overwhelmed by this thought that they develop suicidal tendencies. The point to understand is that everybody suffers from stress, one form or another. If you are feeling depressed, you are not alone; everyone else is and he/she is taking active steps to resolve it. You can do the same, and like everyone else, you will succeed in overcoming this feeling of stress.

6. Learn to say No.

For this, you may need a big time for working with yourself. ☺

