

STRESS AT WORK

While some workplace stress is normal, excessive stress can interfere with your productivity and impact your physical and emotional health. Your ability to deal with it can mean the difference between success or failure. For workers everywhere, the economy may feel like an emotional roller coaster. Layoffs and budget cuts are common in the workplace, and the result is job insecurity, uncertainty and higher levels of stress for employees and employers alike. You can't control everything in your work environment, but that doesn't mean you're powerless - even when you're stuck in a difficult situation. Finding ways to manage workplace stress isn't about making huge changes or rethinking career ambitions, but rather about focusing on the one thing that's always within your control: you. Here are a few steps you can take to reduce your stress on the job.



FIGURE OUT WHAT STRESSES YOU OUT

Keep a stress diary for a week. Record what events or people increased your stress level. Note how each situation made you feel, how you responded and what you wish were different. Then review your diary after several days. What is one stressor you think you can change? Maybe it's how you react to last minute deadlines or how you respond when a colleague is late with something. Make that stressor a priority - brainstorm ways it could be resolved differently, decide on a game plan for change and then implement it. If that tactic doesn't work, try another until you've found a strategy that works for you.

PRIORITISING AND ORGANISING

To the extent you control your daily schedule, make your workload work for you. Time-management skills are vital to planning, prioritizing and completing tasks. Set hourly or daily goals, but be realistic. If there's no way you will complete a project in two days, do not push yourself. If, in the end, you're left with some extra time after completing your project, consider it a few spare moments you can catch up on your emails or get ahead on your next task.

DONT BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

It can be nerve-racking to ask your boss or a colleague for help, but if it keeps you from getting behind or making costly errors, it's absolutely worthwhile to muster up the courage and ask. They might have valuable insight or information that can help you do your job better and faster. In many cases, people will often respect you more for opening up and making your stress known.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

There is a lot to be said for 15-minute breaks. When you allow yourself to walk away from your desk for a moment, you clear your brain, refresh your internal work batteries and reset your posture. Just don't reach for a cigarette or your fifth cup of coffee while you're taking a break. Nicotine acts similarly to stress on your body, keeping it in a tense state, and too much caffeine can make you jittery and then send your energy crashing. Instead, take a brisk walk around the office or outdoors to reinvigorate you.



RESIST THE TECHNOLOGY OUT OF HOURS

Make a conscious decision to turn the work phone off once you leave the office and to not check your emails until you arrive at work the next day. In today's digital world, it's easy to feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day, so establish some work-life boundaries for yourself. Although people have different preferences when it comes to how much they blend their work and home life, creating some clear boundaries between these realms can reduce the potential for work-life conflict and the stress that goes with it.

BREAK BAD HABITS

Perfectionism, procrastination and negative thinking are all bad habits that you should try to avoid to reduce your workplace stress. No project, situation, or decision is ever perfect, so trying to attain perfection on everything will simply add unnecessary stress to your day. Aim to do your best; no one can ask for more than that. If you're always running late, set your clocks and watches fast and give yourself extra time. If your desk is a mess, file and throw away the clutter; just knowing where everything is saves time and cuts stress. Try to think positively about your work, avoid negative-thinking co-workers and pat yourself on the back about small accomplishments, even if no one else does. Many things at work are beyond our control - particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.

WORK ON YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



Even if you're in a job where the environment has grown increasingly stressful, you can retain a large measure of self-control and self-confidence by understanding and practicing emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage and use your emotions in positive and constructive ways. When it comes to satisfaction and success at work, emotional intelligence matters just as much as intellectual ability. Emotional intelligence is about communicating with others in ways that draw people to you, overcome differences, repair wounded feelings, and defuse tension and stress.

DONT BE AFRAID OF THE WORD 'NO'

People pleasing kills production. It can create a guilty inner demon who laughs at you for agreeing to stuff you know is a waste of time or is putting you under even more pressure. Do not fear 'the no'. It may seem like a powerfully intimidating two letter word, but for such a tiny word, 'no' is profoundly liberating. When you decide 'this does not warrant my immediate attention', or 'this is counterproductive', you embrace your intuition. If at any point you've already thought about saying 'no' to something, there's probably merit for consideration. By clearly articulating your needs, challenges, or deadlines to those requesting something from you, you can respectfully decline their request. Say 'no' more often when you really can't manage something or if it is something you should not be doing.

STOP TELLING YOURSELF AND OTHERS THAT YOU'RE ALWAYS BUSY

It has become ingrained into us that when we ask how things are, we automatically respond with 'oh very busy at the moment'. We believe that this should be the response delivered because if it isn't, you might be perceived as not working hard enough or pulling your weight. By telling ourselves that we are busy all the time it can add a level of stress that we don't need. When you're not super busy or heavily swamped, try a positive response such as 'actually, I am doing really well thanks'. Positive thoughts lead to more positive feelings, so try being more optimistic!

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

When stress at work interferes with your ability to perform in your job, manage your personal life, or adversely impacts your health, it's time to take action. Start by paying attention to your physical and emotional health. When your own needs are taken care of, you're stronger and more resilient to stress. The better you feel, the better equipped you'll be to manage work stress without becoming overwhelmed. Taking care of yourself doesn't require a total lifestyle overhaul. Even small things can lift your mood, increase your energy and make you feel like you're back in the driver's seat. Take things one step at a time, and as you make more positive lifestyle choices, you'll soon notice a reduction in your stress levels, both at home and at work.

Consider using your company's Employee Assistance Program or call Lifeline on 13 11 14, as having a chat with a professional can make all the difference to your stress levels.



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