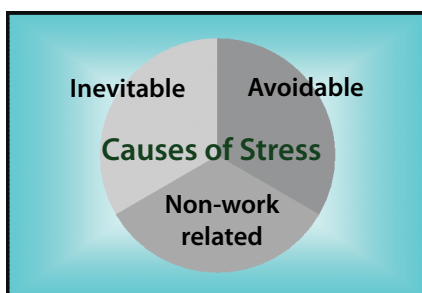


The Help You Need to Manage Stressors

WHAT STRESS EXISTS IN THE WORKPLACE?

There is little doubt that the workplace can be a source of stress – what is most often described as a feeling of being unable to cope with the demands of one's environment. Certain situations push our brains into what is known as the 'fight or flight' mode, a slightly outdated but entirely natural survival mechanism. Most of us experience stress when we feel the urge either to fight (i.e. become aggressive) or run away from a particular situation and struggle to suppress it.

There are many causes of stress, however. Stress can be caused by social, cultural, economic, political, and workplace changes. In Australia, in the last twenty years, many changes have influenced Australian culture and created new stressors within the workplace.



WHAT AFFECT CAN STRESS HAVE ON YOUR WORKING LIFE?

Stress of all sorts can have an impact working life. Relationship problems, problems with children, and financial difficulties, as outlined above, can all impact a person's working life. Work can be perceived as a means of taking control of our own destinies, as a sign of our independence. In many respects, it provides an individual with a sense of identity to belong to a particular company and a particular profession. When a person feels overwhelmed, however, whether it is at work or due to a non-work related stressor, their sense of security in the workplace and by extension, their very identity, can feel threatened.

When a person is experiencing stress and is insecure in themselves, their productivity and general effectiveness is likely to be undermined. They are also likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, and less safe at work.

While there are many people who thrive on stress (we often refer to them as type-A personalities) anyone can become overwhelmed by stress and therefore should be educated and actively encouraged to manage exposure to stressors.

HOW CAN STRESS BE MANAGED IN THE WORKPLACE?

Stress can be created at work as easily as it can be brought to work. However, it is far more likely to be a serious problem if individuals face monotonous work, a lack of variety, unpleasant or aversive tasks, or if they are overloaded with work, their business schedules are strict and inflexible, unpredictable, and badly managed.

There are many ways to manage stress in the work place. Although regular monitoring and education are key to stress management, to limit stress in the work place, companies can:

- Ensure that all work is safe and healthy.
- Create flexible and balanced work schedules.
- Offer family-friendly work (including flexible hours, assistance in times of emergency).
- Offer hazard identification and develop systems for detecting the

presence of stressors.

- Develop the means for employees to report stress.
- Try to avoid isolation and crowding in the workplace.
- Establish physical barriers to deter violence.
- Control the timing and duration of the exposure to stressors.
- Induct and train employees to deal with shiftwork.
- Provide training to help employees deal with the demands posed by their work.
- Give training in time management, goal setting, and prioritising.
- Companies can also take steps to minimise the negative impact of key stressors.

Managers can:

- Provide practical assistance for specific personal issues.
- Offer temporary reduction of workloads.
- Provide appropriate management after any traumatic incident.
- Promote employee involvement in appropriate work activities.
- Provide contact details for centres that may be able to assist staff.
- Provide performance feedback.
- Ensure that workload is matched to their ability.
- Use best practice personnel selection procedures.

HOW DOES STRESS IMPACT AN ORGANISATION?

Most recently, economic challenges have resulted in stressors. In the face of increasing work demands, Australians, who tend to work harder and faster, but not necessarily smarter. The economic situation has brought about a rising feeling of job insecurity. In many instances, work has been associated with anxiety and stress brought about by many factors. Factors such as employment conditions, time pressures, conflicts, and ambiguity lead to loss of productivity and profit.

Frontline staff can struggle with stress when dealing with customers. Those in management positions can experience stress dealing with employers and the demands of meeting the objectives of their organisation. Not surprising, however, the most stressful jobs in Australia are nursing, teaching, and social work according to most studies.

Some of the most stressful jobs are undoubtedly established in the health care industry. Doctors and nurses deal with a phenomenal amount of stress as a result of the everyday situations treating patients and handling the responsibilities associated with their work. After all, medical professionals literally make life or death judgments for their patients – miss a diagnosis or mix up a treatment and a person could die.

From a business perspective, managing the stress associated with this type of situation is tremendously challenging, not just for hospital administrators, but also for those involved in managing family practices and even larger organisations that provide health care services.

Unfortunately, efforts to manage stress in Australia's health care industry, particularly in hospitals, have been relatively slow to pick up. The 2001 Annual Reports of an Australian public hospital

revealed scant attention to occupational health and safety issues and less still to the issue of workplace stress. The hospital aimed to “provide for all employees a working environment with maximum job satisfaction and opportunities for personal growth,” yet stepped up surveillance of “sick leave not absolutely necessary or related to medical conditions”.

By focusing on stress as an employee problem, not a workplace problem, the hospital in question was pushing its employees to seek help elsewhere (there had been an increase of almost 1,000% in the number of clients visiting the staff counseling center in a 10 year period).

In keeping with the targets of the World Health Organisation for stress prevention, however, the report implied the likely benefits of applying a more holistic and direct approach to stress management in hospitals.

One of the best ways to manage stress within an organisation is to acknowledge the problem in the first place, particularly if many of the stressors are directly associated with the nature of the work and the workplace itself.

HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS DEAL WITH STRESSORS?

The best way to minimise stressors is to create a healthy and supportive work environment. External training programs can be useful in identifying and controlling specific stressors and to learn to eliminate stress through open and honest discussion, or by setting up effective rewards for positive achievements by employees.

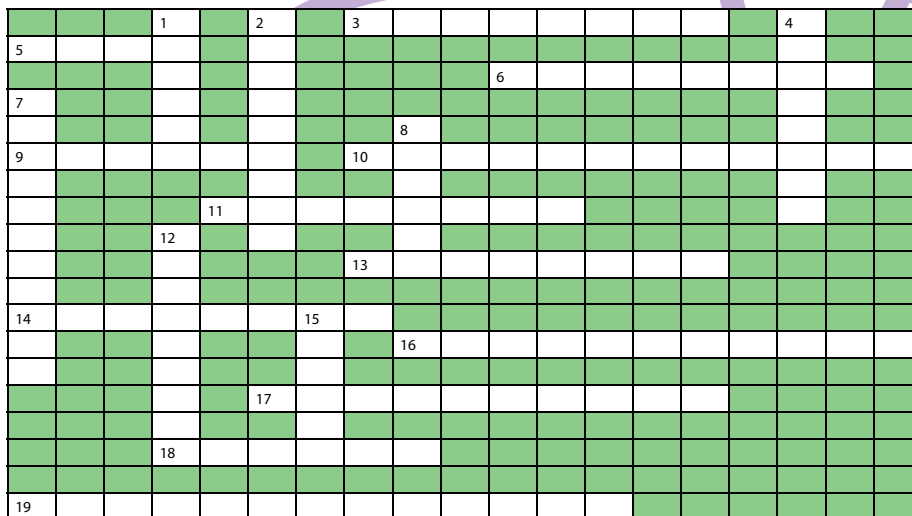
To manage stress, it can also help to try to improve the fit between individuals and their jobs. Reducing stress in organisations is often best achieved through programs which educate employees through to CEOs on how effective job training, performance feedback, and monitoring of problems associated with work can help manage stress.

Above all, however, it is important to take stress seriously and take the time to deal with stressors in the workplace. Stress is, particularly when ignored, a very serious condition. It can wreak havoc upon a person’s physical and psychological well being and undermine their effectiveness in the workplace.

To ensure that employees are productive and effective at work, it is crucial for organisations to develop support initiatives to treat and prevent stress within the workplace. ●

Mind Benders

Training Crossword Puzzle



DOWN

1. A transition from one state to another
2. Synonym of variation
4. Collaboration between people
7. What can a high EQ increase in an organisation?
8. Son of Alcumus (Greek Myth.)
12. Extrapolation of information about sth.
15. Symbol for success and happiness in Spencer Johnson's famous book

Sudoku

		9				4	5	
5		3	1	7		2	6	
	7	8			5			
4	8					3		
9		6		2	8		1	5
2				9	3			
7			3	5				9
8		2			4	1		
		4					2	6

ACROSS

3. Brief intensive course for a small group
5. A business philosophy originating in the Seattle market
6. Site of the 2010 G.O.L.D Arena
9. Emotional strain
10. Coming to terms
11. Plan of action
13. Acquisition of skills
14. Antonym of agreement
16. The drive to action
17. One of Mind Resources training categories
18. Surname of the “Master of Charisma”
19. Process of transferring information

LOGICAL brain teaser - A Man in an Elevator

A man who lives on the tenth floor takes the elevator down to the first floor every morning and goes to work. In the evening, when he comes back; on a rainy day, or if there are other people in the elevator, he goes to his floor directly. Otherwise, he goes to the seventh floor and walks up three flights of stairs to his apartment. Can you explain why?

If You're Puzzled, Get the Answers at:
www.mindresources.net