

# Stress Management Seminar for Supervisors

## WHAT IS WORK-RELATED STRESS?

Stress can hit anyone at any level of the business and recent research shows that work-related stress is widespread and is not confined to particular sectors, jobs or industries.

A definition of work-related stress is: **"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work."**

Stress is not an illness – **it is a state. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop.**

There is a difference between pressure and stress. Pressure can be positive and a motivating factor, and is often essential in a job. It can help us achieve our goals and perform better. Stress occurs when this pressure becomes excessive. Stress is a natural reaction to too much pressure.

Well-designed, organized and managed work is good for us but when insufficient attention to job design, work organization and management has taken place, it can result in work-related stress.

Work-related stress develops because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as more errors.

A person experiences stress when **they perceive that the demands of their work are greater than their ability to cope.**

Coping means **balancing** the demands and pressures placed on you (**the job requirements**) with your skills and knowledge (**your capabilities**).

For example, if you give a member of your team a tight deadline on a project they feel they have neither the skills nor ability to do well, they may begin to feel undue pressure, which could result in work-related stress.

Stress can also result from having too few demands, as people will become bored, feel undervalued and lack recognition. If they feel they have little or no say over the work they do or how they do it, this may cause them stress.

## FACTORS IN STRESS

Stress affects people in different ways and what one person finds stressful can be normal to another. With each new situation, a person will decide what the challenge is and whether they have the resources to cope. If they decide they don't have the resources, they will begin to feel stressed. How they appraise the situation will depend on various factors, including:

- Background and culture
- Skills and experience
- Personality
- Personal circumstances
- Individual characteristics
- Health status
- Ethnicity, gender, age or disability
- Other demands both in and outside work

As a manager you have a duty to ensure that work does not make your team ill. Understanding how to spot the signs of stress in your team, and then know what to do to reduce stress, will help you achieve this.

## THE BENEFITS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR EMPLOYEES

It is not possible to eliminate stress at work for any organization, but that does not mean that your company should not invest in stress management. Stress management is so important in the workplace and it will benefit your organization.

Before considering the impact that stressed employees have on a business and the importance and benefits of stress management, let us first look at both the physical and mental effects that stress has on the employees. Stress can result in irritability, anxiety, depression, headaches, and insomnia.

## COMMON SYMPTOMS OF STRESS ARE:

- Frequent headaches
- Neck ache and back pain
- Frequent colds
- Excess anxiety, worry, and nervousness
- Depress and frequent or wild mood swings
- Insomnia
- Difficulty concentrating

If employees experience any of these symptoms, it's easy to imagine how it will impact your business.

Forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, difficulty making decisions, constant fatigue—these are all things that will end up costing a business in the long run.

## UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON AN ORGANIZATION

Now that we've covered the impact stress can have on employees, let's look at how it impacts a business as a whole.

The work impact that the symptoms of stress can result in include:

- More missed days
- Lower overall productivity
- Higher staff turnover
- Workers' compensation
- Medical insurance & other stress-related expenses

This makes it clear that relationship between stress and job performance is not a positive one. If stress becomes a huge issue and a business starts to experience the issues mentioned above, it can make it hard to acquire new talent. With websites like Glassdoor.com, where former employees can anonymously review their former employer, word can quickly spread about an unhealthy work environment, and it can become a challenge to attract top talent. Ultimately, the result of all of this is lost revenue for a business.

## CAUSES OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

If you feel like stress is affecting job performance, it's a good idea to start digging into what is causing work-related stress.

- Poor company culture
- Long hours & excessive workload
- Worrying about job security
- Poor management, including both under and over-managing
- Lack of communication/transparency about business changes
- Workplace harassment

If you recognize any of these as issues within your organization, now is the time to start identifying ways to reduce stress at work for employees.

- Trouble learning
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty making decisions
- Increased frustration
- Reduced work efficiency or productivity
- Excessive defensiveness

- Problems communicating
- Constant fatigue
- Weight gain
- Increased smoking, alcohol, or drug use
- Understanding the Effects of Stress on an Organization
- Causes of Stress in the Workplace

## ADVANTAGES OF STRESS MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

There are many benefits when an organization utilizes a stress management plan. By lowering the stress level in the work environment companies enjoy:

**Strong company culture:** Employees have a major role in a company's culture. Healthier employees operating under manageable levels of stress will be happier and more positive, helping to maintain a strong, healthy workplace culture that's conducive to creativity and productivity.

**Less sick days:** Stress is one of the leading causes of absenteeism in the workplace. Not only will less stress in the workplace result in less "mental health days," but it will also reduce the amount of sick days taken by employees due to a weakened immune system as a result of excessive stress.

**Employee retention & talent acquisition:** Employees who aren't overly stressed are much more likely to stick around, and prospective employees are much more likely to work for an employer that promotes a low-stress work environment and takes the initiative to help keep their employees healthy.

**It shows you care:** Actively working to reduce stress through measures like stress management programs and policy shows that you care about your employees and their health and happiness.

## HOW CAN EMPLOYERS REDUCE STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE?

There are several stress management techniques that can work for your business. Below are a few of ideas. A stress management professional can assess the individual needs of the company and help develop a tailored stress management plan.

### ADDRESS KNOWN ISSUES

The first place to start. If you know there is an issue that is creating stress, find a way to fix it. This is not always easy, but it is important. If you do not do what you can to give your employees a healthy, low-stress work environment, you are going to suffer from low productivity and will be training new employees sooner than later.

## TRAINING PROGRAMS

Being trained to implement is a strategic place to start, and it also helps you and your organization prioritize stress management as an ongoing initiative.

## WELLNESS PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

Wellness programs have countless benefits for businesses. One of the benefits is reduced stress around the office. Design a campaign to help individuals respond to common stressors, such as work deadlines or traffic congestion that are always going to be part of life.

Stress-related programs are not the only way to help relieve stress around the office, though. Exercise is proven to help reduce stress, so a health initiative is a great way to help employees start making healthier decisions that can reduce stress.

## RECOGNIZING WORKPLACE STRESS

Stress in the workplace can affect every aspect of an organization, from absenteeism rates to interpersonal relationships. It is vital to recognize the signs of stress as early as possible so that actions can be taken before serious stress-related illness occur. The challenge that we face when spotting stress is that everyone experiences it in different ways, which contributes to stress manifesting in very different ways.

There are many factors that can indicate a potential problem for individuals in the workplace.

For an individual, there will be changes; these changes can be physical, emotional, behavioral, or a combination of all three. Changes can include:

- Extroverts becoming withdrawn
- Becoming more accident prone
- Becoming short-tempered
- A dramatic change in weight

Of course, we all experience 'bad days', so we are really talking about situations where people display these negative changes for a period of time (e.g. 5 days in a row).

Looking at an organization as a whole, there are also signs that a workforce is stressed. This can manifest itself as:

- High staff turnover
- Increased absenteeism and sickness levels
- Long-hours work culture
- Employees not taking their full holiday entitlement
- Low productivity and efficiency

## 10 SIGNS YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE SUFFERING FROM STRESS AND ANXIETY

1. Taking more time off work than usual
2. Greater use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs (prescription and illegal)
3. Increased irritability, poor concentration, reduced productivity
4. Deteriorating personal or work relationships, including bullying behaviors
5. Becoming more 'emotional', moody or over-reactive to what others say
6. Starting to behave differently that's out of the norm
7. Changing of eating and sleep patterns
8. Physical reactions such as sweating, palpitations and increased blood pressure
9. Feeling negative, depressed and anxious most of the time
10. Feeling trapped or frustrated ... and believing there's no solution

### HOW TO SPOT SIGNS OF EMPLOYEES WITH STRESS

There are numerous causes of stress in the workplace. It can be incredibly detrimental. If your employees are stressed, they will not be able to work effectively or efficiently. Customer satisfaction levels may also decrease. Particularly, if employees are unable to deliver a quality service. As such it is crucial that managers understand the causes of stress and the symptoms.

### POSSIBLE CAUSE OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE COULD BE:

#### Worry of job security or wages.

Employees who are concerned about their job will not be able to concentrate. They will be scared that any sign of poor work could result in a job loss. Ironically, this tends to lead employees lose focus and in some cases, lose their job.

#### Personal issues

Personal issues can easily affect performance at work. The mind is constantly trying to cope with other issues rather than current work related tasks. These are just some of the causes.

#### Commuting may also cause an employee to feel stressed.

If employees have to travel long distances to work, they might be tired before they get there. Or, they might have fallen behind due to arriving late, causing them to panic and stress.

#### Illness and Attendance

Stress is not just a psychological issue. It may start out that way, but it does tend to cause physical symptoms to develop as well. One of the most common symptoms of stress is sickness or illness. If employees are constantly ill and off work, there is a good possibility they are stressed. Particularly, if they go off for short periods of time regularly. As a manager, you should be keeping a check on attendance levels and looking out for this warning sign.

Be aware that many employees will continue to work through stress-induced sickness. Rather than taking time off, they will still show up every day. Look out for employees who do this. They probably know that their illness is caused by stress and not a physical condition.

Typically, the physical symptoms of illness induced stress or not pleasant. Both vomiting and diarrhea are common. If your employees are constantly rushing back and forth to the bathroom, this could be a sign of stress. Any sign of vomiting or sickness in public bathrooms may be cause for concern. More than one employee might feel stressed and worn down.

### Cleanliness

Hygiene is another area of the body that takes a hit under high levels of stress. Usually, this is due to a lack of care or attention to levels of hygiene. This can lead to the risk of further cases of illness. Dirty hands and yellow teeth may suggest stress because employees feel they have no time for these activities. Bad breath is another symptom for a completely different reason.

When we are stressed, we find it difficult to sleep. Rather than being able to lie peacefully, we toss and turn all night. Due to this, we develop bad breath as bacteria builds up in the mouth. If hygiene levels have deteriorated, the stench can be bad enough for employers and customers to notice.

Stress can have one other effect on the body. Levels of grooming commonly deteriorate to the point where employees look a mess and unkempt. Usually, this is because of a lack of sleep. The body is not given the time it needs to rejuvenate, and workers constantly look tired. Lack of time or inattention to detail also means they don't brush their hair, clean their teeth or shave.

### Psychological Symptoms

Psychological symptoms are trickier to spot, but they are usually there if you pay close attention to detail. You need to watch how your employees act and respond to certain situations. Someone who is stressed may not be motivated to perform. Their work might become sluggish, and they may lose their attention to detail. Due to fatigue from lack of sleep, they can find it difficult to maintain concentration. You may notice this in conversations with a customer or a colleague. They will likely have no interest in customer satisfaction.

People who are stressed may stop socializing completely. Instead, they will focus more of the time on work or perhaps personal issues. They will show no interest in going out with colleagues after work or speaking on anything other than a professional level. They may become detached from society with work and home being the only places they frequent. You won't notice this, but you will be able to see if a once outgoing employee has become withdrawn.

Employees who are stressed may also exhibit changes in mood and personality. People who are stressed are not functioning at the same level they used to. They tend to have difficulty multitasking and can only focus on one issue at a time. Asking them to change their plans will result in irritability, and you might even see an angry outburst. Stressed employees tend to have very little control over their emotions. They might break down, yell or remain completely silent. Any odd mood swing could be a sign of high levels of stress.

Be aware that to deal with these changes employees may look for crutches or coping methods. This can include alcohol, drugs, and even self-harm. Many employees have a glass of wine after a long day at work. However, if they are stressed, they might become more dependent.

You may notice this if they start to smell of alcohol. Or, if they appear to be under the influence of drugs at work. Self-harm can occur in many different forms including substance abuse. However, you might also notice scratches on the arm, burn marks, and even weight loss. Any one of these symptoms could be a sign that an employee needs help.

Employees dealing with stress might also try and stay on top of the situation by doing more than they should. Employees who stay late or arrive early may be trying to take on more than they can handle. They might even take work home with them to try and keep going. While this can work, it will be putting immense pressure on their personal lives and can make the situation worse.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

As a business manager, you have a duty of care to your employees. If you see signs of stress, it is your duty to act. You may want to inform the HR sector of your business. They will be able to talk with the employee and assess whether they do have a problem. They may be able to provide them help or counselling.

An open door policy is a good way to help avoid stress related issues. Your employees should feel comfortable about coming to you with any problems. This includes not being able to complete work to a certain deadline or even discuss personal issues. You must ensure that employees can come to you with problems like this otherwise it's just going to get worse for them.

Be aware that stress can be a widespread problem. This tends to be due to how a company is being run and the pressure all employees are under. Establishing a competitive environment where employees are working to beat each other rather than as a team will cause a lot of stress. Employees will constantly feel as though they need to do more. Obviously, this can encourage higher quality work and increased productivity. However, you must ensure that burden of competing doesn't become too much.

Regularly checking on your employees and conversing with them will ensure levels of stress don't build up. Do this and you can guarantee you have a healthy and effective team of staff behind you and your business.

## BENEFITS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

What are the benefits of teaching stress management in the workplace? Here are some of the top benefits to effective stress management.

- **Less sick days.** Stress is the leading cause of *absenteeism* in the workplace. In addition, people who hate their bosses and co-workers easily find reasons for not coming to work.
- **Employee retention and talent acquisition.** 42% of employees who leave their jobs do so because they feel too much stress. Employees gravitate towards companies who they feel take care of them.
- **Healthier and more productive employees.** When companies have an effective stress management program and policy, it *shows your people that you care*. In doing so you develop a healthy and productive culture.

*When you look after your employees and they will look after your business.*

### 10 STEP STRESS SOLUTION

1. Prioritize Your Health
2. Get a Good Night's Sleep
3. Practice Deep Breathing
4. Stay Hydrated
5. Eat for Wellbeing
6. Get Moving to Combat Stress
7. Adopt a Positive Mind Set
8. Master Your Time
9. Don't be a Slave to Tech
10. Learn to Say No

When stress begins to overwhelm your life and you find that you need some help to overcome it reach out, "It is ok to ask for help". Contact a trained professional and begin the process of de-stressing your life.

Individual and classes available at [Psychift.net](http://Psychift.net)