Letting Go of Stress | Coping with Change at the Worksite

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One Nation Under Stress

• Corporate Mergers
• Corporate Downsizing
• Stock Market Jitters
• Urban Sprawl
• 24/7 Accessibility
• Global Terrorism
• Technostress
• Health Care Reform
• Pension & Benefit Issues
• Global Warming
• Privacy issues

Worksite Stress Facts:
• 93% of worksite accidents are the result of human error. (National Safety Council)
• 47% of US executives surveyed in 2003 didn’t use their vacation time due to job pressures.
• Up to 60% of all absences are caused by stress.
• 72% of US workers report emotional stress is pervasive in the worksite.
• More heart attacks occur on Monday mornings than any other day of the week.

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The Nature of Stress
There are two kinds of stress:

Good Stress: Euphoria or joy
(also known as “Eustress”)

Bad Stress: Distress or simply, “STRESS!”
(also known as: anger, fear, despair, panic, worry, anxiety, impatience, frustration, guilt, annoyance, doubt, irritation, rage, embarrassment, intimidation, envy, hostility, and indignation, etc.)

There are two kinds of “Distress:”

Acute Stress: Very intense, but short lived (usually around 20 minutes)
Examples: Speeding ticket, flat tire, email spam

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The Nature of Stress

There are two kinds of “Distress!"

Chronic Stress: Not very intense, but it endures for days, weeks, months.
Examples: Job stress, marital stress, financial stress, chronic pain stress.

Definitions of Stress

(Many definitions, from many disciplines)

• A loss of emotional control
• The inability to cope with problems
• Wear and tear on the body
• The absence of inner peace
• Any change you encounter in your life

“Stress is a “perceived” threat (real or imagined) to one’s mind, body, spirit or emotions.”
Identify Your Stressors

“I’m an old man now, and I have known a great many problems in my life... most of which never happened.” —Mark Twain

The Fight or Flight Response

A survival dynamic for physical stressors... physical danger.
Today, the fight or flight response is used primarily (and inappropriately) for non-physical stressors, and herein lies the problem: a stress-hormone cocktail that wrecks havoc on the body under repeated bouts of chronic stress.

Biochemistry of stress hormones released during the flight or flight (stress) response include:
- Epinephrine (Catacolamine)
- Nor-epinephrine (Catacolamine)
- Vasopressin
- Aldosterone
- Cortisol

This “stress cocktail” is known to do the following:
- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased rate of breathing
- Increased muscle tension
- Increased perspiration
- Increased metabolic activity

All of these physiological responses are triggered specifically as part of the fight or flight response for physical survival.
Short-term Effects of Stress Physiology

- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased rate of breathing
- Increased muscle tension
- Increased perspiration
- Increased metabolic activity

These are very ineffective for mental, emotional or spiritual stressors.

Long Term Effects of Stress Physiology

- Hypertension (High blood pressure)
- Chronic pain (muscle tension)
- Suppressed immune system
- Colds and flu
- Symptoms of disease or illness
- General sense of fatigue
- Insomnia
- Depression

Stress and Disease

- Eighty percent of visits to primary care physicians are due to chronic stress.
- The relationship between stress and disease is no longer thought to be an association, but a direct causal link.
Stress and Disease
Landmark Research Findings

“Ultimately the body becomes the battlefield for the war games of the mind.”
—Brian Luke Seaward, Ph.D.

The Stress Emotions: Anger & Fear
Anger is the Fight Emotion
Fear is the Flight Emotion
Left unresolved, anger and fear become control issues
The Stress Emotions: Anger & Fear

Anger is the Fight Emotion
Fear is the Flight Emotion

Left unresolved, they may become chronic health issues (e.g., Lupus, Migraines, TMJ, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Fibromyalgia, etc.)

“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.”
— Albert Einstein

The best stress management program addresses both the causes of stress (coping skills) and the symptoms of stress (relaxation skills) to promote optimal wellbeing.
Effective Coping Skills

The purpose of effective coping skills is to increase your awareness of the issue and work toward a peaceful resolution.

Effective Coping Skills

- Reframing
- Comic Relief
- Time Management
- Communication Skills
- Information Seeking
- Journaling
- Social Engineering
- Hobbies
- Social Support Groups

Effective Relaxation Techniques
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“If you are looking for fast acting relief... try slowing down.”
—Lily Tomlin

Effective Relaxation Techniques

The purpose of relaxation techniques is to return the body back to a sense of physiological homeostasis.

• Physical Exercise
• Hatha Yoga
• Tai Chi
• Meditation (Centering)
• Diaphragmatic Breathing
• Progressive Muscular Relaxation
• Guided Mental Imagery
• Music Therapy
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“I cannot and should not be cured of my stress, but merely taught to enjoy it.”
—Hans Selye

Some Final Thoughts

• Stress (change) is, and most likely will be, part of the worksite environment. We must learn to adapt to change.
• You cannot fight or flee from most 21st Century stressors.
• Chronic stress is now linked to many illnesses.
• Unresolved anger and/or fear become control issues that only perpetuate stress.
• Effective Stress Management programs include both effective coping skills and relaxation techniques.
• To see balance in your life, consider striving for some good stress every now and then.

Resources

Books:
• Seaward, B.L., Stressed is Desserts Spelled Backward. Conari Press. 1999.
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Resources

Websites:
Unused Vacation Time

American Work time
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1282/is_n3_v44/ai_11882284

Stress Facts
http://www.timelesst.com/factsaboutstress.html

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