

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Our work environments are one of the biggest causes for stress. The pace of work, and changes in technology has never been greater. Whereas communication used to be by post or fax, we now rely on email and even sms to communicate, meaning things happen quicker; you can be located at any time and anywhere be reminded of work. Combine this sense of constant urgency with longer work hours and increased job insecurity and you have the right ingredients for stress overload.

When people are stressed they react in different ways. Some people get moody, others depressed and anxious whilst some loose their tempers and get illogically angry, irritable and totally loose their sense of humour. Those are emotional symptoms of stress, and no matter how you react; your emotions will affect those trying to work around you, increasing stress all around. Behaviorally; symptoms of stress include impatience, aggressiveness, over work whilst experiencing difficulty in focusing, and making decisions, which again impacts on performance and the moods of those around you. Physical symptoms are even more extreme and can lead to loss of work time due to sick leave.

Imagine yourself in a stressful situation at work: You are leaving for a very important meeting but one of your colleagues who must accompany you is late, which in turn will make you late and reflect badly on you. What do you do? Do you start cursing them calling them names, start throwing things around? Imagine another situation: you need to photocopy important documents for a presentation with your boss, but 5 minutes to the meeting the photocopier breaks down. Do you start shouting, blaming others for not maintaining the machine, hitting various buttons on the copier more and more aggressively as if you can 'thump' it into listening to you?

Now, re-look at those reactions and ask, 'will such actions really solve the situation?' and 'how are my reactions likely to affect those trying to work around me?' why not call your colleague to find out why they are late. Wouldn't you react differently if you knew that he was late because he had to rush his child to hospital? And why not step back from the photocopier and calmly access the situation. Maybe it has just run out of paper or you can get help from someone who uses it more than you?

Irrational reactions are often results of irrational beliefs that you can control everything. Such an attitude is unrealistic, rigid and leads to people blowing small events way out of proportion, which in turn leads to unhealthy feelings that cause distress not just to the person but to those in their team, too. In order to change unhealthy reactions and feelings, we must examine and challenge our feelings towards these types of situation. Ask yourself – 'why is it so terrible that the copier wont work?, why cant I stand it? Is this really a life and death situation? Is there a way around it / or a constructive solution?'

Remember, if you feel stressed out by small incidents, try to step back. If you feel stressed at work all the time, then it is time to seriously re-look at your work / life balance and if you are in the right career.

Madeleine Dunford
Managing Director
Career Connections