When Breathing Techniques and To Do Lists Aren’t Enough: Confronting Stress Management through Organizational Culture

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Top Three Stressors in the Workplace

1.
2.
3.

Common Stressors

- Poor task/role congruence
- Lack of meaning or importance
- Threat of loss
- Negativity ignored
- Lack of communication and feedback
Common Stressors

- Low rewards
- Poor leadership
- No support
- Treadmill syndrome
- Interpersonal conflict

Common Stressors for Supervisors and Managers

- Feeling of helplessness
- Uncertainty
- Urgency
- Overwork

Common Stressors for Supervisors and Managers

- Lack of authority or blurred organizational structure
- Promotion and recognition
- Company politics
- Personnel problems
Workplace Stress
Does Not Occur in Isolation

- Physical
  - Genetic Factors
  - Illness
- Social
  - Relationship Problems
  - Loss
  - Abuse
  - Poor Communication

Workplace Stress
Does Not Occur in Isolation

- Emotional
  - Exaggeration
  - Poor expression
- Mental
  - Lack of autonomy
  - Lack of creative freedom
  - History of trauma

Professional Effects of Stress:
Phases of Professional Health

- Zealot phase
- Irritability phase
- Withdrawal phase
- Zombie phase
Pathological Responses: Chronic Work Stress

- Chronic work stress is a state of ongoing physiological arousal due to stressors in the workplace environment interacting with stressors in other areas of the individual's life.
- Chronic work stress is a symptom indicating that an individual's stress management mechanisms (primarily autonomic nervous system) are not working or are overwhelmed.

Pathological Responses: Burnout

- Burnout leaves a worker debilitated to perform work roles and duties with maximum effectiveness.
- Burnout is often marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment.
- Burnout is not always easily recognizable as a worker can continue to perform the minimum of their roles and tasks.
Pathological Responses:
Compassion Fatigue

• Compassion fatigue is “The natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other – the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.” – Charles Figley

• Trauma is an exposure to a situation in which a person is confronted with an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to self or others’ physical well being.

Common Individual Focused Stress Management Techniques

• Make lists
• Take a vacation
• Pick your battles
• Meditation and focused thinking
• Get enough sleep
• Resist perfection
• Exercise

Common Individual Focused Stress Management Techniques

• Drink lots of water
• Breathe correctly
• Use positive humor
• Take more time for hobbies
• Confide in others about stress
• Treat yourself
• Think positively
Individual Focused Stress Management Techniques

- While individual focused solutions need to be part of addressing workplace stress, they cannot alone be relied upon for effective stress management in your workplace.
- Professionals do not come in with the same level of abilities to use stress management tools in their personal life. Thus, they can not be expected to apply them effectively in a work environment simply on their own.
- Many of the solutions require an amount of time and effort that is simply not a commodity in our existing organizational structures.
- If the culture of the workplace does not reinforce these techniques, professionals will stop using the techniques.

Costs to the Workplace

- Demoralized staff
- Hostile staff
- Punitive environments for the individuals we serve
- Authoritarian management
- Avoidance to challenges or new ideas
- Dishonesty and ethical deterioration

Monetary Costs to Organizations

- It is estimated that workplace stress costs employers excess of $300 billion per year.
- These costs come from:
  - High turnover
  - Decreased efficiency
  - Decreased effectiveness
  - Increased practice errors
  - Inefficient and ineffective use of administrative time
Psychological Capital

- **Hope** - A positive motivational state based on an interactively derived sense of successful goal directed energy and pathways to meet goals
- **Self-efficacy** - The confidence that we can successfully implement an action and be successful with a specific task
- **Optimism** - An attributional style that explains positive events in terms of personal, permanent, and pervasive causes and negative events in terms of external, temporary, and situation-specific ones
- **Resiliency** - An ability to 'bounce back' from change resulting from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change such as progress and increased responsibility

Evidence for Psychological Capital

- Psychological Capital has been shown to increase:
  - Job satisfaction
  - Engagement
  - Positive attitudes
  - Commitment
  - Effectiveness

Evidence for Psychological Capital

- Psychological Capital has been shown to increase:
  - Positive emotions
  - Trust in leadership
  - Creativity
  - Well-being/Health
Development of Hope

• Developing hope is facilitated by goal setting and planning.
• Hope requires healthy work environmental factors that allow for meeting chosen goals.
• Hope requires an organizational culture that models, promotes, and inspires creative processes and outside the box thinking.

Development of Optimism

• Developing optimism is facilitated by self-appraisal and management practices that allow for leniency of the past, appreciation for the present and opportunity seeking for the future.
• Optimism requires clear outcome expectations.
• Optimism relies on all professionals accepting responsibility for successes, failures and challenges.

Development of Self-Efficacy

• Self-efficacy is facilitated by creating choices and providing continual honest performance and attributional feedback.
• Self-efficacy requires task and role congruence.
• Self-efficacy relies on strong and sensitive supervision.
Development of Resiliency

- Resiliency is facilitated by looking at adversity and change through a lens that is asset, risk and process focused.
- Resiliency requires effective application and modeling of positive coping skills.
- Resiliency needs for negative coping skills to be actively discouraged and for destructive coping skills to be prohibited.
- Resiliency uses empowerment as a central tenant of professional development.

Final Encouragement

- What each and everyone of you do is vitally important to the individuals and communities that you serve.
- It is imperative that we strive for excellence individually and organizationally.
- Excellence is not a destination but a journey.
- On that journey, we will hit road blocks, pot holes, detours and traffic jams.
- By building personal and organizational cultures based upon hope, optimism, resiliency and self-efficacy, you not only will be better equipped to deal with the stress from these obstacles but to serve others with excellence.

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