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FIVE OF THE BIGGEST CAUSES OF STRESS AT WORK AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

Here are five of the main causes of stress in the workplace, from feedback that I have been receiving:

1. E-mail Meltdown
2. Meetings, Meetings, Meetings!
3. The Mobile Phone
4. Travel
5. Taking Fridays Off

Many of us don't even realise how much additional stress these situations are creating for us, but they slowly undermine our energy levels and our ability to perform effectively at work.

While they may cause additional stress, taking the steps outlined in this report and implementing them can reduce this. Remember that only by taking ACTION will anything actually change!

1 E-MAIL MELTDOWN

Do you have a full e-mail box? How many e-mails do you get a day: fifty, one hundred, more?

E-mail is of course a modern phenomenon. Anyone who can remember life in the office before e-mail will know that the amount of post and/or faxes received in a day never added up to the volume of e-mails that we are bombarded with in our working lives.

So why is this? Well, it is easy to fire off an e-mail isn't it? No worries about if there is paper in the printer, the correct envelope, if you are going to make the post or not. PLUS you can send it to multiple recipients with barely any extra effort.

That is one of the main causes of e-mail overload, namely the need to copy e-mails to everyone else. If you do this, what is the intention behind it? Are you covering yourself off because you work in a blame culture or, are you just unsure as to who is the most relevant person to receive the e-mail?

What about you? Do you insist that staff and colleagues copy you in on e-mails so you can keep track of what is going on? If so, is it really of any real benefit to you to be receiving these e-mails?

Are you or your staff hiding behind issues, rather than addressing them in more direct ways such as by telephoning you or speaking to you in person. Remember it can be hard to pick up the tone of e-mails and they are more easily misinterpreted than actual conversations.

Actions

Decide on which areas of your work are important and request that people only copy you in on these.

Set aside particular times to read your e-mails – say 3 times throughout the day and then go through them, prioritising them and deleting any that are not of real relevance to you.

Let people know that you are not constantly on e-mail and that it may be better to either call you direct or walk over to see you.

Remember that it is not essential to reply to an e-mail immediately unless you are specifically asked to do so.

When you go on holiday set your auto reply to say who the relevant contacts are and that you will be deleting all e-mails unread on your return. That will make people think twice before bombarding your inbox while you are away.

Set parameters: answer your e-mails between say 8am and 6pm on weekdays only. If you start sending work e-mails at midnight you just train people to expect you to get back to them whatever the time.

MEETINGS, MEETINGS, MEETINGS!

I have a friend who works for someone who is always in meetings. She never has any time for her staff and decisions are made on the hoof with no background to what is going on. It also means she regularly forgets to brief her staff as to what is happening and they end up doing tasks that are no longer relevant!

Constantly being in meetings means that you have no time to take action and implement what has been agreed.

Again, ask yourself why you are in so many meetings. Is it about the company culture? Does it make you feel important?

If you are having to travel to meetings, is this an effective use of your time?

Actions

Can you save time by having a conference call?

Prioritise these meetings in order of importance to the goals that have been set for you in your role. Can some of them be delegated elsewhere in your team?

Can you reduce the regularity of these meetings and make some of them fortnightly as opposed to weekly?

Do these meetings make a difference or are they just talking shops?

What would happen if you conducted the meetings standing up? Would they last as long then?

3 THE MOBILE PHONE

You probably knew that one was coming up didn't you?

I can remember the time when mobile phones were only issued to the sales force, because they were so expensive and also the battery was so big they had to stay in the car, as they could cause you serious injury when you carried them around!

Times have changed however and now mobile phones are everywhere. For sole traders, such as plumbers, electricians etc. they are a vital source of business and can add value (a roofer can take a photo on his mobile to show the damage, without the householder having to go on the roof themselves) in many cases.

However for many people, mobile phones are a source of more stress, simply because they feel that they always have to be contactable and must always answer the phone.

So, are you a slave to your mobile phone?

Actions

Turn your mobile off, outside of office hours (unless you are on call).

Get a separate 'phone for personal use, then you won't be tempted to answer your mobile on holiday or on your day off.

Always switch your mobile 'phone off when you are driving, as this is one of the most stressful situations in which to be having an important business conversations. Many companies now have a policy where their staff are asked not to take calls while driving. That 'urgent' conversation can usually wait until later.

Don't answer your mobile phone during meetings; this is just plain bad manners and that creates tension and stress for all concerned.

4 TRAVEL

Do you commute to work by car, train, bus or bike?

This in itself can be stressful, as delays on the roads keep you stuck in traffic, or the wrong type of snow holds you up on the train.

With more people owning cars and the new train timetable now in place, our journeys to work are taking longer than ever before: so much for progress!

Recent research showed that train commuters suffer more stress actually getting to work than in their actual jobs, because on the train they have no control over what is going on and are powerless to resolve the situation.

Actions

Can you become a homeworker, for even one day a week? This would break up your commuting and reduce your stress.

If driving can you share with someone else in your company, saving you money as well as stress.

Can you hot desk at local offices rather than have to travel long distances to work.

Ensure that you don't schedule meetings late in the day, making your commute home more exhausting, and ultimately, more stressful.

If you are on a train that has mobile free carriages, sit in one of these. There are few things more boring than listening to other people's mobile phone conversations or individual ring tones on the way home when you want to unwind.

5 *TAKING FRIDAYS OFF*

Many people choose to have the occasional long weekend as part of their holiday strategy.

However the majority of those people opt to have the long weekend start on a Friday. This actually creates more stress for them as they try to fit everything in on Thursday before they leave.

Then, if they have their work mobile on, people just cannot resist giving them a 'quick call' on something urgent and their long weekend of relaxation is destroyed.

Actions

Have you noticed that nothing urgent comes up on a Monday? That is because people know things can be dealt with on a Tuesday. If you are taking Friday off however then things are not going to be dealt with on a Saturday, so people try and hand over all these urgent tasks before the weekend to clear their desks.

So, instead of taking a Friday off for a long weekend, take a Monday!

This also applies if you work a 4 day week: keep the Monday as your day off and you will be far less likely to be contacted by work.