

# Stress Management



**Presented by:**  
**Human Resources Department**  
**Training and Development Unit**

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## Before We Begin....

This Stress Management course is in no way a comprehensive treatment of stress and stress-related topics. You should not rely on the information provided to be either accurate or complete. Stress is a very serious problem and should be treated by professionals.

This manual covers one interpretation of the meaning and causes of stress. It also includes several non-invasive solutions to an ever-growing problem. Do not change your habits or dietary regimen based solely on this presentation. Evaluate critically every definition and solution within the confines of your lifestyle and goals.

### Employee Support Services

Miami-Dade County employees can avail themselves of the services provided by Employee Support Services (ESS). These services are available to all Miami-Dade County employees and their eligible dependent family members. Among the major problem areas that ESS can help with are:

- Stress / Anxiety / Emotional problems
- Family / Marital problems
- Alcoholism and Drug-related problems
- Financial problems

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### Training and Development (T&D)

Training and Development is an internal, customer service-focused educational program serving the employees of Miami-Dade County. T&D's mission is to fully support and promote the goals and mission of Miami-Dade County government by providing comprehensive quality programs that will increase the skills and knowledge of Miami-Dade County employees to better serve the community at large. T&D serves as a major intellectual and creative resource to employees and customers by developing strategic partnerships with County departments, educational institutions, and governmental entities.

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## Definitions of Stress

We consider stress to be anything that stimulates you and increases your level of alertness. Life without stimulus would be incredibly dull and boring. Life with too much stimulus becomes unpleasant and tiring, and may ultimately damage your health or well-being. Too much stress can seriously interfere with your ability to perform effectively.

The art of stress management is to keep yourself at a level of stimulation that is healthy and enjoyable. Today, we will help you to monitor and control stress so that you can find and operate at a level that is most comfortable for you. It will discuss strategies to reduce or eliminate sources of unpleasant stress.

Most people realize that aspects of their work and lifestyle can cause stress. While this is true, it is also important to note that it can be caused by your environment and by the food and drink you consume. The strategies that you should use to counter stress depend on the causes of that stress.

### **Positive Stress**

This is the body's normal reaction to change. Positive stress can help you focus, perform, and often help achieve peak efficiency. The key here is that when the challenge has been met, a period of relaxation and enjoyment follows the stressful event.

### **Negative Stress**

This is when the body stays in the "geared up" mode and doesn't have the time to relax between stressful events. The stress responses continue beyond normal or necessary levels. If job stress carries over into your personal stress time (family) or into the sleep time, it can be considered negative.

### **Short-Term Stress**

Stress whose end is known or in sight. It may be a difficult meetings, sporting or other performances, or confrontational situations.

### **Long-Term Stress**

The problems of long-term, sustained stress are more associated with fatigue, morale, and health than with short term adrenaline management. With long-term stress, fatigue and high adrenaline levels over a long period can seriously reduce your performance. Optimizing long-term stress concentrates on management of fatigue, health, energy, and morale.

### **Chronic Stress**

This is when a person never sees a way out of a miserable situation. This is a grinding stress that wears people away day after day, year after year. The worst aspect of chronic stress is that people get used to it. They forget it's there. Physical and mental resources are depleted through long-term attrition.

## Symptoms of Stress

Stress is a normal part of life. Positive stress is actually necessary and beneficial. Excessive or prolonged stress MAY show itself in physical, emotional, or behavioral symptoms.

### Physical Symptoms

- Chest pains
- Headaches
- Ulcers
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Upset stomach
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Heart pounding
- Excess perspiration
- Sweaty or cold hands
- High blood pressure

### Emotional Symptoms

- Irritability
- Depression
- Anger
- Apathy
- Poor self-image

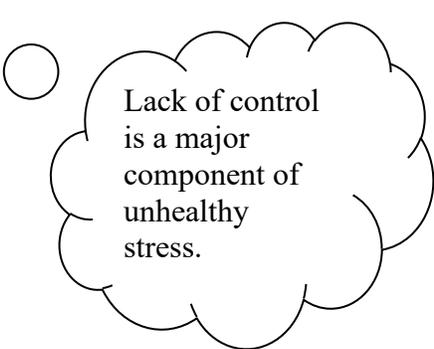
### Behavioral Symptoms

- Irregular Sleep Patterns
- Appetite loss
- Overeating
- Increased consumption of Alcohol
- Drug use
- Increase in smoking
- Memory Loss

## Causes of Stress

There are several major sources of stress:

- Survival stress
- Internally generated stress
- Environmental and job stress
- Fatigue and overwork



Lack of control is a major component of unhealthy stress.

### Survival Stress

Where you are in a physically or emotionally threatening situation, your body adapts to help you react more effectively to meet the threat.

This is controlled mainly by release of adrenaline. The changes are quite powerful and useful in a 'fight or flight' situation. The main ones are:

- Adrenaline mobilizes sugars, giving your body access to more strength, energy, and stamina. This helps you to fight harder or run faster.
- It reduces the blood supply to your skin and short-term unessential organs. This minimizes bleeding if you are hurt, and ensures that energy is not wasted on processes that are not immediately useful.
- You may experience nausea or diarrhea: this eliminates excess weight that might otherwise slow you down.

You may have experienced these changes as fear. Where speed and physical strength are important this adrenaline stress will be helpful and beneficial - fear can help you to survive or perform better.

However, where calm thought or precise motor skills are important, it is best to control and, ideally, eliminate these adrenaline responses. Prolonged exposure to adrenaline can damage your health.

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A r e   y o u   i n   a  
p o s i t i o n   t o  
c o n t r o l   t h e  
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c h a n g e .

### Internally-Generated Stress & Anxiety

Internally-generated stress is stress that you cause for yourself. This can come from anxious worrying about events beyond your control, from a tense, hurried approach to life, or from relationship problems caused by your own behavior. It can also come from an 'addiction' to and enjoyment of stress.

Stress can cause the levels of a chemical called noradrenalin to rise in and between nerve cells. This gives a feeling of confidence and elation that some people like. They can subconsciously defer work until the last minute to cause a 'deadline high', or can create a stressful environment at work that feeds their enjoyment of a situation. The downside of this is that they may leave jobs so late that they fail when an unexpected crisis occurs. They may also cause unnecessary stress for other colleagues who are already under a high level of stress.

Other aspects of personality can cause stress. Examples are perfectionism, where extremely or impossibly high standards can cause stress; and excessive self-effacement, where constant attention to the needs of others can lead to dissatisfaction. A major cause of internally generated stress in many people is anxiety.

### Environmental Stress

Your environment may be a significant source of stress. This can come from:

- Crowding and invasion of personal space
- Insufficient working and living space
- Noise
- Dirty or untidy conditions
- Pollution
- A badly organized or run-down environment

Working environments are rarely perfect; however, often you can improve your environment quite cheaply.

## Fatigue and Overwork

Here stress builds up over a long period. This can occur where you try to achieve too much in too little time, or where you are not using effective time management strategies.

## Chemical and nutritional stresses

The food you eat may contribute to the stresses you experience. Examples of stressors you may not be aware of are:

- *Caffeine*: This raises your levels of stress hormones, makes it more difficult to sleep, and can make you more irritable. Many people report as big a reduction in feelings of stress after switching away from coffee as they do after giving up smoking. Note that there is often as much caffeine in a cup of tea as there is in a cup of coffee.
- *Bursts of sugar from sweets or chocolate*: These can make you feel more energetic in the short term. However your body reacts to stabilize abnormally high sugar levels by releasing too much insulin. This causes a serious energy dip shortly after the sugar high.
- *Too much salt*: This raises your blood pressure and puts your body under chemical stress.
- *Smoking*: Most people who smoke feel relaxed after a cigarette. If you smoke, however, try taking you pulse before and after a cigarette and think about the difference. Smoking puts your body under chemical stress. Most people who have given up smoking feel much more relaxed generally after the initial 'giving up' period is finished.

As well as these specific sources of stress, you may experience stress if you eat an unbalanced or unhealthy diet. You may find that some dietary deficiency or excess causes discomfort and illness which generates stress. If you are obese, then this causes physical stress on your internal organs and emotional stress as your view of yourself declines.

While there is a lot of crooked, biased, naïve or incorrect dietary information around, you can normally rely on nutritional advice from your doctor or from government health education. Before you accept advice, examine the motives of the people offering the advice!

## Lifestyle and job stress

Many of the stresses you experience may come from your job or from your lifestyle. These may include:

- Too much or too little work
- Time pressures and deadlines
- Responsibility for people, budgets, or equipment
- Frustration and boredom with current role

- Lack of clear plans and goals
- Demands from clients
- Disruptions to plans
- Frustration at having to overcome unnecessary obstacles
- Financial or relationship problems
- Ill-health
- Family changes such as birth, death, marriage, or divorce.

## The Stress Response

The common response to stress, known as the general adaptation syndrome, was first identified by endocrinologist Hans Selye in the 1930s. Selye outlined three stages in the body's stress response: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. The stress response plays an essential role in helping the body to react quickly and decisively to sudden threatening changes in the environment. When the threats recede, the body uses similar mechanisms in order to return to the normal state of homeostasis – a steady level of functioning in the middle of ordinary life's fluctuations.

### 1. **Alarm**

Alerted to the presence of a threat, the hypothalamus activates the first level of the stress response, known as the alarm stage. It lasts only a few seconds.

- i. The heart begins to pump harder and faster
- ii. The lungs pick up the pace to provide more oxygen
- iii. The digestive tract reduces its activity to a minimum
- iv. Pupils dilate to capture more light
- v. Sweat breaks out to cool off the body
- vi. Dilated vessels increase the blood flow

### 2. **Resistance**

The hypothalamus prepares the body for a more sustained response. On orders from the hypothalamus:

- i. Nearby pituitary gland releases hormones causing a chain reaction
- ii. Each adrenal gland secretes cortisol (key messenger linked to chronic stress) that increases the supply of blood glucose to heart and brain. Cortisol also depresses the reproductive and immune system.

### 3. **Exhaustion**

The effort to keep the key organs functioning at maximum efficiency can exact a significant toll. If the threat is not overcome during the resistance stage, the body's reserves begin to dwindle, ushering the final phase, exhaustion.

## Stress Levels and Stages

### Optimum Stress Levels

The level of stress under which you operate is important: if you are not under enough stress, then you may find that your performance suffers because you are bored and unmotivated. If you are under too much stress, then you will find that your results suffer as stress-related problems interfere with your performance.

It is important that you recognize that you are responsible for your own stress - very often it is a product of the way that you think. Learn to monitor your stress levels, and adjust them up if you need to be more alert, or down if you are feeling too tense.

By managing your stress effectively you can significantly improve the quality of your life.

### Response Stages

The stages that you may go through in response to sustained levels of excessive stress are:

- During the first phase you will face challenges with plenty of energy. Your response will probably be positive and effective.
- After a period of time you may begin to feel seriously tired. You may start to feel anxious, frustrated and upset. The quality of your work may begin to suffer.
- As high stress continues you may begin to feel a sense of failure and may be ill more frequently. You may also begin to feel exploited by your organization. At this stage you may start to distance yourself from your employer, perhaps starting to look for a new job.
- If high levels of stress continue without relief you may ultimately experience depression, burnout, nervous breakdown, or some other form of serious stress related illness.

Different people may move between these stages with different speeds under different stress conditions. The strongest and most flexible position is to actively manage your levels of stress and fatigue so that you are able to produce high reliable quality work over a long period of time.

High performance in your job may require continued hard work in the face of high levels of sustained stress. If this is the case, it is essential that you learn to pay attention to your feelings. This ensures that you know when to relax, slacken off for a short period, get more sleep, or implement stress management strategies.

## Stress Myths

### 1. **Stress is the same for everyone**

Completely wrong. Stress is different for each of us. What is stressful for one person may or may not be stressful for another; each of us responds to stress in an entirely different way.

### 2. **Stress is always bad for you**

According to this view, zero stress makes us happy and healthy. Wrong. Stress is to the human condition what tension is to the violin string: too little and the music is dull and raspy; too much and the music is shrill or the string snaps. Stress can be the kiss of death or the spice of life. The issue, really, is how to manage it. Managed stress makes us productive and happy; mismanaged stress hurts and even kills us.

### 3. **Stress is everywhere, so you can't do anything about it.**

Not so. You can plan your life so that stress does not overwhelm you. Effective planning involves setting priorities and working on simple problems first, solving them, and then going on to the more complex difficulties. When you mismanage stress, it is difficult to prioritize. All your problems seem to be equal and stress seems to be everywhere.

### 4. **The most popular techniques for reducing stress are the best ones.**

Again, not so. No universally effective stress reduction technique exists. We are all different, our lives are different, our situations are different, and our reactions are different. Only a comprehensive program tailored to the individual works.

### 5. **No symptoms, no stress.**

Don't be fooled by this one. Absence of symptoms does not mean the absence of stress. In fact, camouflaging symptoms with medication may deprive you of the signals you need for reducing the strain on your physiological and psychological systems.

### 6. **Only major symptoms of stress require attention.**

This myth assumes that the "minor" symptoms, such as headaches or stomach acid, may be safely ignored. Wrong again. Minor symptoms of stress are the early warnings that your life is getting out of hand and that you need to do a better job of managing stress.

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## What Works For You?

What follows are several suggestions that may help you to identify techniques that encourage the “rest period” between each stressful occurrence. We will discuss:

- General Stress lowering concepts
- Stress Diary
- Anticipating Stress
- Imagery
- Setting Goals

### **BUT Please consider the following FIRST**

You have experience. You have dealt with stress your entire life. You already have a battery of skills that have helped you to reduce stress and lead of productive life. Everybody has ways of reducing stress. WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD? What has helped you to manage stress in a healthy way? They may include:

- Fishing
- Bowling
- Family Outings
- TV
- Swimming
- Reading
- Singing
- Religion
- Crossword puzzles
- Games (chess, baseball, basketball)
- Exercise (walking, skating)
- Hobbies (juggling, drawing, sewing, skiing)

Examine what has worked for you in the past and why they may not be working now.

- Have you reduced or stopped these activities?
- Do they no longer work (need replacement or modification)?
- When was the last time you did any of these activities?
- Work, peers, or family have talked you out of your solution.

# Balance

Primary approaches to maintaining and restoring balance (homeostasis) are:

**1. Support**

- a. Conditional – Job, marriage, friends
- b. Unconditional – Pets, faith (not church), special interests, special people

**2. Exercise**

- a. Walking – does more to eliminate headaches. Sends out endorphins (pain relief).

**3. Hobbies**

- a. Try solo hobbies - don't need anyone else
- b. Structured – same time and place
- c. Backup Hobby – in case primary is unavailable
- d. Seasonal – different times and weather

**4. Relaxation**

- a. Restructure your day
- b. Enter your day more slowly

**5. Nutrition**

- a. Practical Nutrition – less fat, more water

**6. Play**

- a. Most therapeutic
- b. Results in high self-esteem

## Triple 'A' System



### **A**ltering situations to make them less stressful

One of the most effective ways of making a situation less of a stress point is to change it.

- Alter your physical environment to make it less stressful, more comfortable, and better suited to your needs.
- Alter your interpersonal situations through problem solving, discussion and negotiation, assertively communicating your requests, or outright bargaining with others to change their behaviors.
- Alter YOU. Our own behavior is often the cause for stress in our interpersonal situations. Check your common perceptions, attitudes, and use of words.

### **A**voiding stressful situations

In our culture avoidance is often seen as weak. We are told to deal with difficulties. There are times, however, where altering a situation isn't worth the time, energy, or effort. Sometimes avoidance is the optimal short term strategy:

- Get out of the office and take a walk
- Take a vacation and forget about the office and its politics
- Watch out for direct power confrontations with superiors at work

### **A**ccepting

There are times when we can neither alter nor avoid a stressful situation. A simple example is being stuck in traffic and knowing that you will be late to a meeting.

- Accept reality – consider your options clearly and logically
- Upside-downside technique – Find the “silver lining” in the situation
- Stress Inoculation – preventive technique for reducing the stress of an anticipated situation that can be neither altered nor avoided. It involves relaxing deeply and then imaging yourself, while in this relaxed state, in the midst of the anticipated stressful situation.

## The Healer Within

As mentioned before, the techniques in this manual are not a substitute for competent medical care. Seek the professional advice of experts before relying on any approach to stress reduction.

### 1. **Quiet Time**

Just like the war-weary soldiers, your immune system needs rest to regain its fighting edge. Be sure to set aside quiet time for yourself every day.

### 2. **Deep Breathing**

This is a way to enhance relaxation and meditation. It can provide relaxation periods throughout the day. Deep or diaphragmatic breathing improves the distribution of oxygen to tissues and is a powerful means of shifting your body into an anabolic metabolic state and recharging yourself.

### 3. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)**

Consists of learning to first tense then relax different muscles throughout the body, at the same time paying close attention to the feelings associated with tension and relaxation. As your muscles relax, the small blood vessels of your body also relax and expand, improving circulation to your organs.

### 4. **Meditation**

Some people prefer meditation as a method of quieting and concentration. The spiritual aspects of meditation may be reassuring and calming and may reinforce your belief that you are receiving help for your problem.

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## 15 Steps to Lower Stress

1. Invest thirty minutes in vigorous exercise, 3 to 5 times per week (assuming your doctor doesn't have a problem with that). Work up a sweat.
2. Learn relaxation techniques.
3. Cut down on the caffeine.
4. Eat right.
5. Meditate. Get still. "Center."
6. Develop better time management habits.
7. Play. Have fun. Recharge.
8. Get plenty of sleep.
9. Smile more. Laugh. Use humor to lighten your emotional load.
10. Count your blessings – daily. Make thankfulness a habit.
11. Say nice things when you talk to yourself.
12. Simplify, Simplify, Simplify.
13. Set personal goals. Give yourself a sense of purpose.
14. Forgive. Grudges are too heavy to carry around.
15. Practice optimism and positive expectancy. Hope is a muscle – develop it.

**If you do not take feelings of tiredness, upset or discontent seriously, then you may face failure, burnout, or breakdown.**

## Stress Diary

### Finding Your Optimum Stress Levels

Keeping a stress diary is an effective way of finding out what causes you stress, the level of stress you prefer, and your effectiveness under pressure.

In this diary, note down your stress levels and how you feel throughout the day. In particular, note down stressful events. Record the following information:

- At a regular interval, for example every hour, record routine stress. Note:
  - the time
  - the amount of stress that you feel (perhaps on a scale of 1 to 10)
  - how happy you feel
  - how efficiently you are working
  
- When stressful events occur, write down:
  - What was the event?
  - When and where did it occur?
  - What important factors made the event stressful?
  - How stressful was the event?
  - How did you handle the event?
  - Did you tackle the cause or the symptom?
  - Did you deal with the stress correctly?

## Analyzing the Diary

After a few weeks you should be able to analyze this information. It may be interesting as you carry out the analysis to note down the outcomes of the jobs you were doing when you were under stress.

This should give you two types of information:

1. You should be able to understand the level of stress you are happiest with, and the level of stress at which you work most effectively. You may find that your performance is good even when you feel upset by stress.
2. You should know what the main sources of unpleasant stress in your life are. You should understand what circumstances make stresses particularly unpleasant, and should be able to see whether your strategies for handling the stresses are effective or not.

**You will get the real benefits of having a stress diary in the first few weeks.** After this the benefit you get of keeping it each additional day will reduce. If, however, your lifestyle changes or you begin to suffer from stress again in the future, then it may be worth using the diary approach again. You will probably find that the stresses you face have changed. If this is the case, then keeping a diary again will help you to develop a different approach to deal with them.

Once you have discovered the stress level you are happiest with, and understand what triggers unpleasant stress, make an **Action Plan** to control it. Some elements of this action plan will be actions you are going to take to contain, control, or eliminate problems that are causing you stress. Other parts may be health related such as taking more exercise, changing your diet, or improving the quality of your environment. It may also cover stress management techniques that you will employ when stress levels begin to build.

### Key points:

Keeping a stress diary helps you to learn how you handle stress. It helps you:

- find out the stress levels you prefer
- to know how effectively you operate under pressure
- understand the things that cause you stress
- to see how effective your stress control strategies are

Once you have kept a stress diary for a number of weeks, you will be in a position to analyze it and develop an action plan to control stress.

## Anticipating Stress

### Managing Stress by Preparing For It

By anticipating stress you can prepare for it and work out how to control it when it happens. You can do this in a number of ways:

#### **Rehearsal:**

By practicing for a stressful event such as an interview or a speech several times in advance you can polish your performance and build confidence.

#### **Planning:**

By analyzing the likely causes of stress, you will be able to plan your responses to likely forms of stress. These might be actions to alleviate the situation or may be stress management techniques that you will use. It is important that you formally plan for this - it is little use just worrying in an undisciplined way - this will be counterproductive. Formal planning of responses to stress is a technique used by top-level athletes to ensure that they respond effectively to the stresses of competition.

#### **Avoidance:**

Where a situation is likely to be unpleasant, and will not yield any benefit to you, it may be one you can just avoid. You should be certain in your own mind; however, that this is the case, and that you are not running away from problems.

#### **Reducing the Importance of an Event:**

When an event is important to you, this can make it very stressful. This is particularly true where you are operating at a high level, where many people are watching, or where there is the prospect of a large financial reward, of promotion, or of personal advancement. The presence of family, friends or important people can also add to pressure. If stress is a problem under these circumstances, then think carefully about the event - take every opportunity to reduce its importance in your eyes:

- If the event seems big, put it in its place along the path to your goals. Compare it in your mind with bigger events you might know of or might have attended.
- If there is a financial reward, remind yourself that there may be other opportunities for reward later. This will not be the only chance you have. Focus on the quality of your performance. Focusing on the rewards will only damage your concentration and raise stress.
- If members of your family are watching, remind yourself that they love you anyway. If friends are real friends, they will continue to like you whether you win or lose.
- If people who are important to your goals are watching then remind yourself that you may well have other chances to impress them.
- If you focus on the correct performance of your tasks, then the importance of the event will dwindle into the background.

### **Reducing Uncertainty:**

Uncertainty can cause high levels of stress. Causes of uncertainty can be:

- Not having a clear idea of what the future holds
- Not knowing where your organization will be going
- Not having any career development plans
- Not knowing what will be wanted from you in the future
- Not knowing what your boss or colleagues think of your abilities
- Receiving vague or inconsistent instructions

In these cases, lack of information or the actions of other people are negatively affecting your ability to perform. The most effective way of countering this is to ask for the information you need. This might be information on your organization's performance. It may involve asking what your employer wants from you in the future, so that you can set the appropriate career development goals. If you are unsure of how you are doing, ask for a performance review. Where instructions are inconsistent or conflicting, ask for clarification.

If you ask in a positive way, then people are usually quite happy to help.

### **Take Control:**

In his book, *Stress for Success*, stress Doctor Janes E. Loehr notes, “The perception of an event being beyond one’s control is associated with distress, depression, and a variety of other health risks.” Stress becomes bad when we feel that we can’t control what’s happening. Loehr says the key is not to get rid of stress but to be in control. Look for control in some aspect or in some area of your life.

### **Key points:**

By anticipating stressful situations you can prepare for them. This may involve rehearsals, plans to counter stressful contingencies, or avoidance of an unpleasant situation altogether.

Stress may also be caused by the size of an event. If this is the case, put it in its proper context within your goals. Where stress arises from uncertainty, ask for information you need.

## Imagery

### Mental Adjustment of Stress Levels

Imagery is a potent method of stress reduction, especially when combined with physical relaxation methods such as deep breathing.

You will be aware of how particular environments can be very relaxing, while others can be intensely stressful. The principle behind the use of imagery in stress reduction is that you can use your imagination to recreate a place or scene that is very relaxing. The more intensely you imagine the place or situation, the stronger and more realistic the experience will be.

#### What is imagery?

Remember that your brain is a mass of nerve cells. Your sense organs convert signals from your environment into nerve impulses. These feed into the areas of your brain that interpret that environment. Imagery seeks to create a similar set of nerve impulses that can feed into those areas of the brain that experience the outside world.

The effectiveness of imagery can be shown very effectively if you have access to equipment that measures body stress (this functions by measuring, for example, muscle electrical activity, electrical conductivity through skin sweat, etc.). By imagining a pleasant scene, which reduces stress, you can cause a needle on the machine to move in one direction. By imagining an unpleasant and stressful situation, you can move it in the opposite direction. This can be quite alarming when you see it happen the first time!

#### **Imagery in stress reduction**

One common use of imagery in relaxation is to imagine a scene, place, or event that you remember as safe, peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. You can bring all your senses into the image, with sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the taste of cool white wine, the warmth of the sun, etc. Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress and pressure.

Scenes can involve complex images such as lying on a beach in a deserted cove. You may 'see' cliffs, sea and sand around you, 'hear' the waves crashing against rocks, 'smell' the salt in the air, and feel the warmth of the sun and a gently breeze on your body. Other images might include looking at a mountain view, swimming in a tropical pool, or whatever - you will be able to come up with the most effective images for yourself.

Other uses of imagery in relaxation involve mental pictures of stress flowing out of the body; or of stress, distractions, and everyday concerns being folded away and locked into a padlocked chest.

### **Imagery in preparation and rehearsal**

You can also use imagery in rehearsal before a big event, allowing you to run through it in your mind. It allows you to practice in advance for anything unusual that might occur, so that you are prepared and already practiced in handling it. Imagery also allows you to pre-experience achievement of your goals. This helps to give you the self-confidence you need to do something well. Successful athletes use imagery this way to prepare for important performances.

#### **Key points:**

With imagery you substitute actual experience with scenes from your imagination. Your body reacts to these imagined scenes almost as if they were real. To relax with imagery, imagine a warm, comfortable, safe and pleasant place, and enjoy it in your imagination. Imagery can be shown to work by using machines that measure body stress. By imagining pleasant scenes and unpleasant scenes, you can alter see your body stress change.

## Setting Goals

### **How to Set Goals Effectively:**

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Result-oriented
- Time-bound

### **Where Goal-Setting Can Go Wrong:**

- Setting goals without agreement
- Setting goals too high or too low
- Conflicting or inaccurate wording
- Contradictory goals

### **Benefits of Goal Setting**

- Allows personal assessment
- Improves performance
- Provides a sense of accomplishment
- Increases morale
- Provides direction

### **When Goal Setting is used effectively, people:**

- Suffer less stress and anxiety
- Concentrate better
- Show more self-confidence
- Perform better
- Are happier and more satisfied

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# EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

## For the Supervisor:

### *How to Prevent Burn Out Employees...*

Do you have employees complain that work is not fun anymore? Do you have employees that overreact to minor hassles, report being overwhelmed, and complain of minor health ailments? If so, you could be dealing with employees who are feeling burnt out with their work.

#### Other signs of burnout include:



Employees who no longer laugh or have fun at work.



Employees who are irritable toward coworkers/customers.



Employees who always see work as a chore.



Employees who frequently worry.



Employees who feel lethargic and/or empty in their work?

#### How to Prevent Employee Burnout:

##### What is burnout?

Burnout results when individuals experience increasing amounts of negative stress. Stress itself is a neutral event, and it is up to the employee to interpret the stress as either being helpful (positive) or unhelpful (negative). For example, you can have two employees each with the same job assignment and deadline, and each interpret the stress associated with the deadline differently. The employee who sees the stress positively feels motivated, energized, and excited. He or she is motivated to put in the extra work and hours to do their best work. They feel a strong sense of accomplishment when they are done. The employee who interprets the stress as negative, feels instantly overwhelmed, irritable, and starts to worry. They most likely put in the same amount of work into the project, but it is done out of fear and obligation and not out of purpose and meaning. At the end of the project, he or she will feel drained and not energized for the next project. Put enough of these projects (negative stresses) together and you have an employee heading for burnout.

## Why should you care about if an employee is burned out or not?

1. *The employees most likely to develop burnout are your best employees.* Your superstar employees are more likely to feel burnout because they usually put more of themselves into their job, spend more time at work, and take work more seriously and personal. An employee that does not take their work personally will not likely experience burnout. Burnt out employees are employees that care and only caring employees are going to experience burnout.
2. *The superstar employee who is burnt out is likely to be the last to see it.* Furthermore, before they correct the problem, they will likely do all the wrong things to try to correct it themselves. They might increase the amount of time they spend at work, become more personally involved in their work, and increase their amount of effort they put into their job. Their methods of coping are likely to only make the problem worse and not better because they are attempting to outperform their stress. For example, a sales person that attempts to sell more products each month is likely to be heading for burnout when they do not realize that other aspects of their job might be just as important as their sales numbers. Employees who attempt to outperform their stress usually end up feeling discouraged and quit at some point. When this occurs, the employer has lost one of their best employees.
3. *Employees who report experiencing a high level of stress are three times more likely to suffer from frequent illness.* The experience of burnout is a stressful event in and of itself, so an employee who is burnt out has not only the original stress to deal with but also the stress of being burnt out.
4. *Burnout is a relatively easy problem to resolve.* It usually does not require formal counseling, medication, or a trip to the family doctor. It is also possible to recover from a mild case of burnout within a day, or at the most a few days. If your employee has not resolved their burnout within a week or two they may not be experiencing burnout at all, but a case of depression. Clinical depression can mimic the symptoms of burnout, but clinical depression will also be with the person when they are at home and burnout usually is a workplace problem.

## How can I help an employee who is experiencing burnout?

1. You can *create an atmosphere that promotes employee health.* One that emphasizes balance along with competition. A local company that a friend of mine worked for rented out a movie theater once a month so all their employees could watch as many movies as they wanted to for a day. Their employees went back to work feeling cared about and more energetic. Your company may not need to rent a movie theater; the point is, a good way to burn off stress and to re-energize employees is with fun and laughter. In fact, it can be the best way.
2. *Create job diversity for employees that must perform repetitive tasks.* This is not only good for the employee but also for the company to have their employees cross-trained. That way if one employee must take an extended leave, others are there that know how to perform their duties.
3. *Keep employees involved.* One way to decrease burnout is to increase the amount of control that an employee has in their work. An employee that feels they have a choice in what they are doing, even if it is a small choice, is more likely to feel better about what they are doing. Think of where small choices can be added to an employee's day.
4. *Allow employees to chat at work.* Chatting about non-work related events is one way in which employees can decrease and prevent burnout at work.

5. Lastly, *make sure you are not trying to do too much with too little.* It is okay to ask your employees to give 110% occasionally but not every day. So make sure that your company is staffed appropriately, provides competitive personal leave and vacation benefits, and that you remember to recognize and reward employees for their accomplishments and contributions.

## For the Employee:

### *How to Prevent and Rid Yourself of Burnout...*

Have you lost your enthusiasm for your work? Is your work become more than a drag but a weight that gets heavier and heavier? Are you feeling that you no longer get satisfaction from your job, or are you questioning the value of tasks that you perform? Are you entertaining the thought of finding a new job? If so, you could be suffering from burnout and not necessarily from a bad job.

Symptoms of burnout:



Do you no longer laugh or have fun at work?



Are you more irritable toward co-workers or customers?



Do you always see work as a chore?



Have you developed chronic worry about your job?



Do you feel lethargic and empty in your work?

## Preventing and Ridding Yourself of Burnout:

### Here is the good news:

You are probably not burnt out due to your work or boss directly, but you are experiencing burnout by how you are coping with both the negative and positive stress in your job. Since you can rarely escape stress, it is extremely important to learn how to change the stress that you feel into either a neutral or positive force in your life.

### Here are some suggestions on how you can change stress into a positive or neutral experience:

1. One way to change stress is to *change the way in which we interpret any stressful event*. We change how we interpret an event by changing how we think about the event. Instead of saying, “I can’t do this, it won’t work out.” It is better to say, “I will break this project down into small steps and talk with my boss later to negotiate more time.” Even slightly changing how we “choose” to evaluate an event, will greatly decrease the amount of burnout we feel. Try to eliminate words and phrases such as, “hate,” “can’t stand it,” “no way,” etc...etc... Make a list of those negative words or phrases that you most often use, and then flag them each time they are said, and replace them with a more neutral word or phrase.
2. *Work to have fun at work*. You do not need to throw a party, but you can have fun by talking with a co-worker, listening to music, and by just increasing those tasks that you do enjoy at work. Attempt to complete tasks that you do not enjoy right away, so you don’t think about them all day long. If you honestly cannot find anything you enjoy about your work, you might not be experiencing burnout at all, but a true feeling of needing a new job.
3. *Work to create job diversity for yourself*. If you go in the same door every day, sit at the same desk, and start the day off with the same phone calls, is a routine that can easily lead to boredom. Add some job diversity to your day; for example, ask to change your start time, redecorate your cube, and ask to take on new job tasks. Do not ask to take on additional busy work, but ask to take on a new assignment you think you will enjoy.
4. *Realize that one reason that you are burned out is because you are a creative person whose creativity is not being used*. So, be creative. Wear a unique necktie or outfit so you get some positive comments from co-workers. Be creative by looking at the work you are doing and think about how to modify it or improve it. Take these ideas to your supervisor and tell them that they will increase productivity or save the company money.
5. *Ask for some control in your job*. If you need permission to take control, ask you employer to take a risk by allowing you to take control over your job for one week to see if production increases. If they will not allow complete control, ask for control only over one small aspect of your job. Then slowly ask for more and more until you have as much as you want.

Gary Vikesland, MA LP CEAP

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## Human Resources Department

### Training & Development Unit

#### Products & Services

##### Professional Development Clinics (PDC)

- Conflict Management Resolution (CMR)
- Creative Problem Solving Strategies (PROB)
- Employee Recognition (RECG)
- Highly Effective Teams (HET)
- Leadership: Developing the Leader Within You (LEAD)
- Making Meetings Work (MMW)
- The Secret Behind Motivation & Delegation (MODE)
- Managing Multi-Generational Employees (MGE)
- Engaging Employees In Changing Times (EECT)
- Marketing Your Department (MKT)
- Managing Up (MUP)
- Managing Across (MAS)
- Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt (LSYB)

##### Expanded Classes

- Orientation to Personnel Procedures (OPP)
- Business Writing I (BUS L1)
- Business Writing II (BUS L2)
- Customer Service & Communication (CSC)
- Mediating Workplace Disputes (MWD)
- Structured Interviewing & Selection Techniques (STI)
- Violence in the Workplace (VIW)
- Dealing With Difficult People (DWDP)
- Maintaining Work-Life Balance (MWLB)
- Art of Oral Presentation (AOP)

##### Basic Classes

- Customer Service & Communication (CSCN)
- Interviewing Made Easy (IMEN)
- Stress Management (STMN)
- Time Management (TMSN)
- Valuing Cultural Diversity (VCDN)
- Violence in the Workplace (VIWN)

##### Clinics

- Grammar Writing (GRAMN)
- Resume Writing (RESN)

##### New Employee Orientation (NEO)

- New Employee Orientation (NEO)
- Ethics
- Know Your County Government (KYCG)
- Service Excellence (SE)
- SecureIT
- Employee Protection Ordinance (EPO)
- Diversity
- Keys to Unlocking County Services (KUCS)

##### Supervisory Leadership Development Program

###### (SLDP)

- Developing Others
- Teamwork and Group Leadership
- Problem Solving & Technical Credibility
- Decisiveness

##### Frontline Leadership Development Program

###### (FLDP)

- Customer Service
- Communication
- Problem Solving & Technical Credibility
- Continual Learning

##### Communications Certificate Program (CCP)

- Grammar Essentials
- Writing For Government
- Writing For Results
- The Art of Public Speaking