

## Tips for managing everyday stress

It's not stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it. — Hans Selye

A five-year study of the American workforce conducted by the Families and Work Institute showed that 30% of employees often or very often feel burned out or stressed by their jobs, 27% feel emotionally drained from their work, and 42% feel used up at the end of the work day.

### The good and bad about stress

Stress is the wear and tear our minds and bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment — including work. As a positive influence, stress can compel us to action; or result in a new awareness and an exciting new perspective. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger or depression, which in turn can lead to incivility in the workplace, illness, lower productivity, clouded thinking, poor decision-making skills, and slumping employee-retention.

Just as there are many sources of stress, there are many options for managing it. However, all require work toward change — changing the source of stress or changing your reaction to it.

### A few tips for “de-frazzling” and reducing everyday stress

- **Become aware of your stressors and your emotional and physical reactions.** Notice your distress. Don't ignore it. What events distress you? Are you being realistic? Can you see patterns?
- **Recognize what you can change.** Can you change your stressors by avoiding or eliminating them? Can you reduce their intensity (manage them over a period of time instead of on a daily or weekly basis)? Can you shorten your exposure to stress (by taking a break, for example)? Devote the time and energy necessary to making a change, including goal-setting, time management techniques, etc.
- **Reduce the intensity of your emotional reactions to stress.** Stress is triggered by your perception of danger/fear. Are you expecting to please everyone? Are you overreacting, viewing minor things as critical and urgent? Do you always need to be right? Work at adopting views that are more moderate. Put the situation in perspective. Don't wallow in negative thinking, or going over and over things that have already passed. Seek outside resources—reading, seminars, professional counsel—if needed.
- **Moderate your physical reactions to stress.** Slow, deep breathing will bring your heart rate back to normal. Relaxation techniques can reduce muscle tension. Aromatherapy can serve as a continual relaxer throughout the day. Disciplines such as meditation and exercise refocus the mind and body.
- **Maintain your physical and emotional reserves.** Exercise and eat well. Maintain supportive relationships Pursue realistic goals that are meaningful to you, rather than goals others have for you. View frustrations, failures, and sorrows as opportunities for learning and deepened awareness.
- **Look out the window or take a walk outside.** A survey of 4,500 workers in the Department of Energy found that people who sit near a window have 23% fewer complaints of stress-related illnesses such as headache, back pain, and exhaustion.
- **If you're stuck in the office** and can't get outside, try three stress-busting exercises: 1) Close your hands in a tight fist for 10 seconds and slowly open them. 2) Slowly roll your head from side to side. 3) Tighten your toes, hold them for 10 seconds, and release. Breathe. Repeat each step five times.
- **Change your mind-set.** People become stressed when they dwell on the problem instead of finding a solution. Allow yourself no more than 10 minutes to stress out about something. When 10 minutes are up, identify at least three immediate actions toward solving your perceived problem.
- **Operate in the present.** Anxiety often stems from our worrying over the past or the future. Reality—and stress-relief—can be found in our perspective and actions in the present. If you feel overwhelmed or unable to manage it on your own, seek the help of a qualified therapist.