



Feeling Overloaded at Work? Tips to Minimise Stress in the Workplace

The scenario is familiar by now. Many companies have reduced their workforce over the years but expect those who remain to be more productive and efficient. In most cases, employees are required to plough through twice as much work in half the time and with half the resources.

At the outset, employees may not mind the extra hours or taking on some new or unfamiliar jobs. However, when the extended hours become a daily occurrence and weekends are spent doing extra work to keep up with shorter deadlines and greater expectations, stress levels will soon start to rise.

This is life in the 21st century, where stress is a badge of honour and work is never complete - people only find a place to pause and catch a breath. Though stress in itself is not harmful, excessive and sustained high stress levels can be damaging in the long run.

There are a number of factors that can cause stress including changes at work, at home and in people's relationships. Stress manifests itself in many forms and can have a positive or negative impact on people. While some people take a stressful situation as a cue to take a determined and definitive action, others can be paralysed and suffer a feeling of being lost or even depressed when faced with stress.

Most stress management experts agree that the key to handling stress is not to eliminate it but to manage it and use it for positive results.

DBM recommends some ideas to help cope with today's high performance work environment by managing stress and using it in a positive way.

- Simplify procedures and cut out layers in the project review process. Decide if projects really need to be signed off at all levels of management or can a few steps be removed? Streamlined procedures usually translate to lower stress levels and higher productivity.
- Try to place a few dynamic people throughout your organisation. Identify the workaholics and strategically position them according to workload. Most importantly, give them the resources, authority and ability to network with other top achievers. They will help keep productivity up and energise the people around them.
- Jack Welch, former CEO of GE Corporation, was a big fan of tapping and nurturing 'star performers' not only in sport but also in a corporate environment. He said star performers bring ideas, energy and dynamism that can boost a team or company's performance.
- Strive for the most effective communication across all levels. Encourage an open line of communication where employees can communicate up or down across the organisation's hierarchy. A transparent communication program ensures employees know what is expected of them and enables them to accomplish their goals.





- Pace yourself. Assume long hours if that is what quality – not politics – demands. Set priorities and eliminate a few routine, time-consuming tasks from your workload.
- Exercise and keep fit. With the proliferation of gyms, sports club and other recreational areas, starting an exercise program and getting fit has become much easier. Many people take time out before or after office hours or during lunchtime for a workout in the gym. Exercise has been proven to have positive impact in stimulating the body and the brain. Physical exercise is a perfect way to relieve stress while keeping fit.
- Schedule some normal time in your life. When fighting stress, go for activities that counteract your regular work. For instance, if you sit at a computer all day, do something that is active or verbal after-hours. If you never get off the phone, try gardening. A short walk or stroll at a park near home or the office also helps relieving stress.
- Imagine what other stimuli might energise you. Perhaps there is something that you always wanted to learn, either job-related or just something that you want to know.
- Nurture creativity in your off hours as well. Perhaps you have always wanted to write a book, join a class, take up a new sport or learn to play a musical instrument. Do it and lower your stress levels.

What you should not do is find an out of hours activity that adds stress to your life. For instance, it may be that rock climbing, although good fun makes you feel stressful and anxious. Pick an activity for sheer enjoyment.

So if you or members of your team are displaying all the classic signs of over-work, stress and burnout – stop! It is possible to survive the high performance days of the 21st century. But, like everything else in life, effective management (of stress) is the key.

About DBM

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