

HOW LEADERS/MANAGERS CAN IDENTIFY AND HELP STAFF WHO ARE EXPERIENCING STRESS

Wellington Leadership Meetup Group

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1:00 PM to 2:00 PM

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SECTION 1: WORKPLACE STRESS?

What is a 'stressful workplace?'

Workplace stress is not defined by NZ law.

Which is I believe is not a problem since there is no such thing as a workplace stress or a stressful workplace!

If there was, then at the start of each day, we as leaders would be able to ask all our employees to take out their stress and pop it into the rubbish bin by the door.

What we do have are workplaces full of individuals who are experiencing stress.

According to the UK's Stress Management Society, 1 in 6.8 people experience mental health problems.

A 2015 UK [Mental Health Foundation study](#) found that people with mental health problems made up an estimated 15.9% of total employment.

[NatCen Social Research's 2016 British Social Attitudes 33 report](#) states that 37% of workers experience stress "always" or "often". The study found that Professional and managerial workers, and those aged 35-44 are most likely to feel stressed.

UK YouGov Survey (2014)

- Surveyed 2330 UK adults (aged 18 plus)
- 1 in 5 people feel anxious nearly all the time, or a lot of the time.
- 41 % feel anxious some of the time
- 22% of women reported feeling anxious a lot of the time - men 15%

Some individuals may be experiencing a negligible level of stress.

Others may be overwhelmed by stress.

The majority of people will be experiencing stress at a level somewhere between the two extremes.

People with chronic stress experience it 24/7 – at home and at work. They arrive at work experiencing a level of stress which may be added to by the events of the work day.

Employers are not responsible for issues outside the workplace, such as stress experienced as a result of breakdown of personal relationships or personal finances. That said, employers should take reasonable measures to help an employee cope with the stress experienced as a result of non-work related events.

SECTION 2: WHY SHOULD WE AS LEADERS HELP OUR EMPLOYEES CONTROL THEIR STRESS?

What is the impact of having stressed employees on our organisation?

Ask the audience for ideas.

There are many good reasons for helping our employees to reduce and control the level of stress they experience.

Improve the overall well-being of the organisation

There is a growing awareness of the importance of good mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Wise leaders are conscious that their organisations are strongest and most resilient when they have a diverse workforce, fully engaged with their work. Good leadership and management practices are required to successfully implement a well-being strategy.

Investing in well-being can lead to greater resilience, innovation and productivity. Well-being strategies need to be tailored to the organisation's unique needs and characteristics. An effective workplace well-being programme can deliver mutual benefit to employees and the business.

Valuing, protecting and improving employee mental health requires a consistent commitment from top to bottom across the whole organisation – rather than just a piecemeal approach.

The concept of wellbeing is best defined by the World Health Organisation as a state wherein “every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

The workplace is key to promoting the nation's health and well-being.

Legal Obligation

HSWA 36 Primary duty of care

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA), an employer must make sure, as reasonably practicable, that health and safety risks in the workplace are identified and managed properly. Whilst focus is typically given to reducing the risk of physical harm, HSWA (s16) importantly defines health as being both physical and mental.

Employment NZ says employers are obliged to monitor employees for potential workplace stress, such as keeping an eye on workload, job performance and the types of tasks being performed, as well as looking for any physical signs of stress.

Under the Act employers have no duty of care for ensuring the health and safety of its employees in relation to non-work related threats. However, the reality is that the majority of our employees will be experiencing stress largely because of non-work threats.

Per the FindLaw website there has been a noticeable increase in the number of stress-related personal grievance claims reaching the Employment Relations Authority and Court

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and the Department of Labour has successfully prosecuted at least one employer for failing to protect an employee from harm caused by stress.

Financial Impact

The cost of days lost due to stress related absence; overtime to cover lost time; recruitment to replace employees who have left the organisation due to experiencing stress.

The most up to date research on the impact of stress in the workplace comes from the UK:

- the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reported in 2016 that **11.7 million working days** were lost in 2016 due to stress (HSE 2015/2016). With the average cost of 'sick days' costing **£522 per day**, workplace stress cost the UK economy a total of **£6.1 billion** in 2016. Workplace stress is directly responsible for 37% of all work related ill health cases and 45% of all working days lost due to ill health.
- The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) reported that **for an organisation with 1000 employees, the annual cost of mental ill health is estimated to be more than £835,000**. NICE estimated that identifying problems early – or preventing them in the first place, could result in cost savings of 30%, equivalent to more than £250,000 per year.

Improve the organisation's image and reputation

Employers who are committed to the idea of wellbeing for their staff are more likely to attract and retain talented staff.

A reputation as a 'good' employer who is serious about enhancing the well-being of its workforce will help to retain staff and to attract new staff.

Employers who are committed to the idea of wellbeing for their staff are more likely to attract and retain talented staff. At the same time, a "well" workforce provides a lift in productivity, employee engagement and organisational performance.

Reduce Absenteeism and Sickness Levels

Employment NZ says an employee with workplace stress that amounts to an illness may take sick leave. The ordinary conditions for sick leave apply.

If we can help people to better manage their mental health then the organisation will experience fewer days lost to sickness and absenteeism.

Reduced mental health is now the primary cause of lost working days in most Westernised countries. When an organisation equips its workforce with the life skills to control their stress then individuals will be healthier.

According to 2016 UK government data, 35% of all work-related illness is due to stress and 43% of all sick days are a result of workplace stress. This means 9.9 million working days per year are lost because of stress related illness.

Reduce Presenteeism

"Presenteeism", is where sick and burnt-out individuals keep coming to work for fear of losing their jobs. 'Presenteeism' can be 1.5 times greater than the cost of absenteeism.

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Reduce Staff turnover

Higher retention of staff, reduced staff turnover and intention to leave. People are happy in their work and don't want to leave an organisation that cares about and supports their wellbeing.

A 2016 estimate by the risk management firm Willis Towers Watson estimated the financial cost of losing and replacing an employee is typically at least half of the position's annual compensation and nearly 80 percent in the case of senior positions. Added to those costs are the inevitable disruptions in business plans and loss of institutional memory that result from employee departures.

Improve Productivity

73% of respondents in the 2015 UK Mental Health Foundation study had been through times at work where they felt stressed, overwhelmed or had trouble coping. As a result of these feelings, respondents reported that distress had left them less productive than they would like.

People experiencing stress become disengaged and their ability to work effectively is impacted.

A workforce experiencing less stress provides a lift in organisation wide productivity and performance. People experiencing less stress:

- work harder and perform better when they are not experiencing stress.
- feel more motivated and committed to their work.
- have increased morale.
- have increased engagement

Reduce the incidence of accidents

People experiencing stress are more likely to be involved in accidents. . Immediate safety problems (I was so tired I didn't see the warning light flashing)

SECTION 3: UNDERSTANDING STRESS

The definition of stress actually comes from physics. It means a:

A force exerted on a material that causes strain or deformation.

If you put pressure on a piece of metal for example and it bends, that's considered stress. The term stress comes from the field of engineering. It wasn't applied to human beings until 1936. Since then it's become a ubiquitous, overused term that is open to myth and misunderstanding.

If we as leaders are to create an organisation in which we proactively help and support our employees to effectively manage their stress levels we need a definition that is understood throughout the organisation, so everyone is *'singing from the same song sheet.'*

To help my clients to understand how they 'do' stress I developed the STRESS model.

How we create Stress: The S.T.R.E.S.S Process

- **Stimuli**
- **Threat Detection**
- **Reality Generation**
- **Emotional Reaction**
- **Stress Response**
- **Stress Symptoms**

Things happen (divorce, layoffs, disease, etc.), and you experience stress—or you don't—depending on what you think about those things. Stress is a function of beliefs, not circumstances.

There's a saying 'knowledge is power' and if as leaders we are going to be successful at reducing the level of stress our employees experience we need to understand the problem.

Stress is not a thing. It's a natural mind/body process that runs subconsciously 24/7.

Stress vs Pressure

Human Function Curve

It would be a dull life if there were no challenges in it. The Human Function Curve shows that having no challenges can result in stress for an individual. We all need the presence of challenges that stretch us to a degree, we can operate within our tolerances and function effectively. A balance between stimulation and rest is required and common experience suggests that our ability to respond to challenges is limited. When we perceive ourselves to be overstretched a challenge becomes a threat.

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Pressure (often referred to erroneously as 'good stress') helps keep us focused, energised and able to meet challenges. It's what keeps you on your toes in meetings/presentations. It arouses the Challenge Response which has a different cocktail of hormones and chemicals than the Stress (fear) Response.

When we perceive the level of pressure we are experiencing exceeds our ability to cope with that level of pressure we perceive this as a threat and experience stress.

How do we 'do' stress?

S.T.R.E.S.S.

STRESS IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF A NATURAL MIND/BODY PROCESS (IT IS NOT A THING IT'S SOMETHING WE DO)

The STRESS Process

S	STIMULI	External: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person • Place • Thing Internal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought/Feeling • Sensation
T	THREAT	There is a real or perceived, present or imminent threat to my physical wellbeing.
R	REALITY Generation	The satisfaction of my physical and/or emotional needs is under threat.
E	EMOTIONAL Response	Fear Anxiety
S	STRESS RESPONSE	Automatically triggered in response to fear or anxiety
S	SYMPTOMS (AKA 'STRESS')	Physical: Bodily sensations Feelings: "I feel anxious"

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	Thinking: “What if...” Behaviour: Fight, Flight, Freeze
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The S.T.R.E.S.S process is a chain reaction that starts with a stimulus and ends in the symptoms we commonly refer to as 'stress'. The process comprises the following stages:

S = Stimulus

The STRESS process is initiated by a stimulus or trigger either from the environment around us (a person, thing, situation) or from within us (a sensation, feeling or thought). The stimulus is relayed to the thalamus, an area in the fore-brain, which acts like a switchboard sending the data simultaneously to the amygdala (located in limbic system - the emotional centre of the brain) and the neocortex (the thinking brain).

T= Threat

The stimulus arrives at the amygdala before it reaches the thinking brain. Our emotional brain checks to see whether the stimulus represents an immediate or imminent danger to our physical and/or emotional needs. If the answer is yes, step 3 in the process is skipped because our survival may well depend on us "acting now and thinking later."

R = Reality Generation

Our brain is a virtual reality generator. We don't experience the world objectively, only through our own subjective perception of it. Within our brain is the perceptual framework within which our entire experience of the world is constructed. We are not passive experiencers of the world; rather we are the creators of the world we experience.

A moment after reaching the amygdala the stimulus arrives at the thinking brain. Our thinking brain sets about interpreting what the stimulus means. Was the emotional brain correct and we're facing a real danger or did it overreact or make the wrong assessment? Based on our thinking brain's perception of the stimuli, it could confirm the stimuli as a threat to our physical and/or emotional needs or if not tone down or switch off the emotional brain's alarm.

E = Emotion

The fourth step in the S.T.R.E.S.S. Process is emotional arousal. The two emotions that can be aroused by real or perceived danger are fear and anxiety.

Fear is believed to be the oldest and strongest of emotions. It has ensured our survival as a species.

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Anxiety is aroused in response to a perceived future danger. It causes us to behave with caution when approaching potentially dangerous situations or situations with uncertain outcomes. We respond with apprehension, nervousness or dread and react by preparing, planning and practicing so we can mitigate the risk inherent in the potentially dangerous situation.

S = Stress Response

In response to fear or anxiety the stress response is automatically activated. During the stress response hormones and neurotransmitters, like adrenalin and cortisol are released. These hormones and neurotransmitters prepare our body for physical action - to combat (fight) or escape from (flight) the real or perceived threat. As a result, our heart pounds, our muscles tense, and we are suddenly on high alert.

Stress = Stress Symptoms

The final step in the stress process is Stress. 'Stress' is the label we commonly use to describe the cocktail of brain - mind - body changes we experience as a result of activating the stress response. This cocktail comprises the following changes:

- cognitive (the way think),
- emotional (the way we feel and our moods),
- physiological (the way our body changes)
- behavioural (the way we behave)

The way we mix our stress cocktail is unique to each of us, and as a result, we all experience stress differently. However, our stress cocktail comes in two broad flavours:

1. Acute stress - the stress that we experience in response to a real and present danger. Once the danger has passed the stress response is switched off and our body returns to it's normal balanced state.
2. Chronic stress - the name given to the prolonged and on-going activation of the stress response. Chronic stress can disrupt almost all our body's processes. Research suggests that chronic stress underlies many of the illnesses and diseases that are overwhelming our health system and destroying the quality of middle and late life.

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Pressure

Often when people say they are stressed what they really mean is that they are experiencing pressure.

“Pressure is a situation in which you perceive that something at stake is dependent on the outcome of your performance.”

~ Hendrie Weisinger, Ph.D

“Performing Under Pressure: The Science of Doing Your Best When It Matters Most,”
(Crown, 2015)

Stressors

Nothing has any meaning until we give a meaning. This means there are no universal stressors. Nothing has the inherent power to cause stress in you. It's only once you've interpreted something as a threat to your physical and/or emotional wellbeing that it can be labelled a 'stressor.'

Whilst there are no universal stressors, research has identified a number of events or circumstance which the majority of people interpret as being a threat to their physical or emotional needs. I call these 'common stressors.'

Research would suggest that the majority of common stressors exist outside of the workplace. One of the most well-known lists of common stressors is the Holmes Rahe Life Events scale. This scale is the result of surveying thousands of people to find out what they perceived caused them the most stress. The list has 45 stressors. Of these events only five are work related

1. Losing one's job [47]
2. Change to a different line of work [36]
3. Change in responsibilities at work [29]
4. Trouble with one's boss [23]
5. Change in one's work conditions [20]

All five are related to our need for security. Four of the five are directly related to a change in circumstances. Human's don't like change.

What does this mean for an organisation?

It means that many of the 'big' stressors that are causing your employees to experience stress are non-work related and therefore difficult for you to influence.

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Life Event Stressors

Non –work related events that the majority of people perceive as a threat to their emotional wellbeing include:

- Bereavement
- Divorce or separation from a partner
- Marriage
- Pregnancy
- Changes in health of a family member or close friend
- Children leaving home
- Domestic problems such as childcare
- Change in financial state, or debt or money worries
- Personal issues e.g. a personal injury or illness
- Daily hassles e.g. traffic jams
- Moving house

Common Work Related Stressors

The Holmes Rahe scale identifies these as being the work related situations which are perceived as threats by most people.

1. Threat of losing one's job
2. Change to a different line of work
3. Change in responsibilities at work
4. Trouble with one's boss
5. Change in one's work conditions

All five are related to our need for security. Four of the five are directly related to a change in circumstances. Humans don't like change.

In my research it appears that for most people these are the four **Emotional Needs** they are most seeking to meet in the work situation (in no particular order):

Security: The safety of the working environment – psychological safety and physical safety

Achievement: People want to be challenged and be recognised and rewarded for their performance.

Emotional Connection: To have friends at work and be a part of supportive relationships.

Meaning and Purpose: Work should do more than meet our basic financial needs; it should also improve the quality of our lives by giving us meaning and purpose and contributing to our overall well-being.

There is evidence that particular types of work may be intrinsically more difficult to cope with than others. Some examples of work that contains intrinsic stressors are:

- work that is emotionally challenging, draining or even repugnant (e.g. policing, emergency medicine, corrections service, some aspects of social work)

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- work that requires long periods of intense concentration (e.g. air traffic control)
- work that has high consequences from error (air traffic control, policing, social work, medicine).

SECTION 4: HOW CAN I TELL IF A PERSON IS EXPERIENCING STRESS?

It's unlikely that an employee will tell us they are experiencing stress

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) survey 2016 found that only 43% of respondents had disclosed their stress or mental health problems to their current employer or manager.

This is consistent with other research suggesting that around half (48%) of people suffering from mental health conditions such as anxiety and stress feel too uncomfortable to talk to their employer about their experience.

A UK Mental Health Foundation study concluded that men are almost 50% more likely to never seek medical support for a mental health problems than women. In the largest survey of its kind, they asked over 2,500 people living with mental health problems about disclosure of mental health problems and experiences of seeking support. The study found that women were 32% more likely than men to have told friends or family about their mental health problem within a month. Men on the other hand were 40% more likely than women to wait over two years or never tell friends or family about their mental health problem. Men can often feel isolated and unable to tell people how they are feeling.

It is more accepted for men to deal with stress, emotions and situations with anger and aggression. Anything else is interpreted as vulnerability and shut down. Men are more likely to say something like 'I'm feeling a bit shit' when really they mean, 'this is the worst I've ever felt in my life and I can't imagine feeling worse.'

Employment NZ advises that if the employee chooses to disclose they are stressed and they identify the source of the stress as work related, it's the employer's responsibility to:

- look into the issue
- come to their own decision about whether the problem is work-related
- discuss the situation with the employee
- agree on appropriate solutions.

So Leaders/Managers need to be able to recognise employees who are experiencing stress

Managers need to be able to recognise employees who are experiencing stress and should have the training and systems to make sure they can recognise the signs that someone is experiencing stress.

It's vital to recognise the signs of stress as early as possible so that prompt action can be taken.

Care should be taken not to over react to small changes in behaviour. We all have days when we wake up and we feel ready to take on the world; and other days can feel like a struggle. So when assessing whether an individual is stressing we are really talking about situations where people display these negative changes for a period of time (e.g. 5 days in a row).

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Employment NZ advises that an employer may ask an employee who says they have stress to see a doctor to be properly diagnosed, but the employee is under no obligation to do this. However, an employee has a duty to report any workplace threat to their health and safety, which may include stress.

NB. It is not up to you or your managers to diagnose stress. If you or they are very worried about a person, recommend to that person that they see their GP.

The challenge that we face as leaders/managers when spotting whether a person is stressing, is that everyone experiences stress in their own unique way.

Stress manifests in the form of physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural symptoms or a combination of all four. Use these symptoms (both individual and group) as clues.

Red Flags that a member of your team may be experiencing stress:

The individual....

An individual's behaviour will change.

They may become angry, irritable, withdrawn, , appear fatigued. They may be

Behaviour:	Emotional:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (an extrovert) becomes withdrawn and avoids interaction with colleagues • becomes apathetic, loses interest in work • deteriorating relationships with colleagues. • regularly works through lunch or eats on the run • regularly takes work home with them skips breaks, • appears to be always rushing, hurrying • arrives later or takes more time off. • says things they regret • engages in frequent or long-term absenteeism • becomes accident prone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is subject to mood swings • overreacts to small events • becomes short-tempered, irritable or has angry outbursts
Cognitive:	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appears indecisive • appears to find it hard to focus on the task or to concentrate. • overlooks or forgets important details • has difficulty communicating effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appears tired, drained, exhausted • suffers with frequent headaches, migraine • physical appearance changes • has a dramatic change in weight

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Red Flags that the organisation as a whole has a problem with high numbers of employees experiencing stress.

Monitor factors that might suggest there is a problem with stress-related illness in the organisation, for example:

- Increased reports of stress
- High staff turnover
- high rates of absenteeism and sickness levels
- Long-hours work culture
- Employees not taking their full holiday entitlement
- Low productivity and efficiency
- conflict between staff
- Increase in complaints and grievances
- Customer dissatisfaction or complaints

What to do if you spot a Red Flag

If you suspect a staff member is suffering from stress, report your concerns to appropriate senior personnel while maintaining any obligations of confidentiality.

Arrange a confidential meeting with the person, allowing them the opportunity to discuss any problems they wish and allowing you time to voice your own concerns. It may help to clarify whether the person's problems are work related or personal. The individual is not obliged to tell you their personal problems, but there are some practical things you could do to manage the situation and support them:

- a) ask your employee for a quiet word somewhere private.
- b) let them know that you've noticed that they've been acting a bit differently and ask if they'd like to talk to you about anything. Don't try to diagnose or second guess your employee's feelings, keep questions open-ended and neutral. Be sympathetic.
- c) outline the support and services the organisation offers. For example:
 - childcare services
 - flexible working arrangements
 - offer them some paid time off to deal with their problems
 - family leave policies
 - employee assistance programmes
 - fitness programmes.
- d) offer outside support. If appropriate, you could suggest they visit their doctor and allow them time off to do so. You could also suggest support groups.

Responding to stress complaints

There are certain events that should trigger an investigation into stress levels at work. The most obvious triggers are complaints and reports of excessive stress. This may be from the employee themselves, their manager, a colleague, or even other people who have regular contact with the employee, such as their family, a mentor, or a client.

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Such complaints or reports may, for example, be made during a performance review or management audit. It may be made formally in writing, or informally during conversation. It could come about indirectly, for example, if a client refuses to deal with a particular employee because they find them “uptight and irritable lately”.

All complaints of excessive stress that could cause harm in the workplace should be investigated.

SECTION 5: WHAT CAN LEADERS DO TO HELP REDUCE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE ORGANISATION WHO ARE STRESSING?

A key point to consider is that both the individual employees and the employer have roles and responsibilities in reducing the level of stress experienced by the individual. Everyone at every level of the organisation has a part to play individually and jointly.

I suggest a three pronged strategy be implemented:

1. Change the organisation
2. Change ourselves
3. Help individuals to better manage their mental health
4. Support individuals who are currently experiencing stress

1 CHANGE THE ORGANISATION

Develop and implement an organisational culture of wellbeing that is supportive of employees who are suffering from stress

“Our research shows that improved employee wellbeing leads to better engagement in the workplace and ultimately to a more productive organisation,” says Sarah Trotman, director of Executive Education at AUT.

It’s clear that supporting good mental health has significant benefits to businesses and workers alike. Establishing a culture of wellbeing that is long lasting and effective needs to come from the top down.

Organisations need to create a safe and comfortable environment in which:

- everyone feels that their work and the benefits they receive contribute to their wellbeing.
- awareness of mental health issues such as anxiety and stress is raised, discussed and conversations about these issues, between individuals and their manager, or a member of the human resources team, is encouraged.
- relationships between employees and their managers is encouraged so the employee is confident to approach their manager for help with work-related problems.
- internal and external support is provided.

What is “wellbeing” and how can we know when we’re achieving it?

The concept of wellbeing is best defined by the World Health Organisation as a state wherein *“every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the common stressors of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”*

Wellbeing, even corporate wellbeing, is not solely the responsibility of an organisation. Individuals also have a role to play in ensuring their own wellbeing and managing their pressures and health.

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Exercise and a healthy lifestyle is extremely important when it comes to combating stress. The organisation could introduce employee wellness schemes and encourage employees to participate in them. Initiatives might include paying for a portion of employees gym memberships, encourage employees to go for a walk at lunchtime, running group-wide healthy eating challenges, funding mindfulness classes, massage therapy, exercise classes – gym, yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi.

Engage with and communicate with your staff about stress and mental health and raise awareness of the issue.

According to the chair of Britain's Healthiest Company advisory group, Dame Carol Black, when it comes to stress, prevention is much better than cure: every £1 spent on workplace wellbeing can yield between £3 and £6 in gained productivity and efficiency.

As leaders we need to be active within our organisation to remove the stigma and ignorance that surrounds mental health. We need to develop a culture where it's normal to talk about stress and have open conversations about it.

Identify and eliminate, isolate or minimise the common stressors (factors that the majority of people perceive as a threat to their physical and/or emotional wellbeing).

Design and implement strategies to eliminate reduce or reduce the impact of known work related stressors e.g. review and if necessary modify workloads and responsibilities, increase communication, allow employees some flexibility in when and where they work, provide performance feedback. The advantage of addressing common workplace stressors is that one action can have an immediate beneficial impact on the stress level of many staff.

Survey employees to determine which of their NEEDS are not being met to their satisfaction. Use the results to identify common stressors across the workforce.

- a) Eliminate the stressor by removing it from the work environment altogether.
- b) Isolate the stressor by regulating and limiting employees' exposure to it – either by limiting the time of exposure or by limiting the exposure to people or groups of people specially selected or trained for the work.
- c) Minimise the stressor by reducing its extent and impact or reducing the time for which people are exposed to it.

The same approach can be applied at an individual level.

- a) **Eliminate** - This could be done, for example, by reducing their working hours, taking them off shift work, decreasing their level of responsibility or moving them to a job where they are not likely to suffer from boredom (which can be just as stressful as an excessively challenging job).
- b) **Isolate** - This could be done, for example, by organising work so that angry customers and customer complaints are dealt with by those who are most able to cope.

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Policy - Mental health policies are important

An organisation needs systems and policies that support mental health. And consistency is critical. It can be achieved with well-implemented policies shaped both by leadership and by those with lived experience.

Equip Line Managers with the skills to help their staff who are experiencing stress

Line Managers act as the first line of support to employees, so they play a key role in ensuring that help and support is provided to employees experiencing stress. Yet very often Line Managers, have little experience or knowledge of how to identify and support stressed people and in their teams.

Without adequate training, managers will be ill-equipped to:

- understand and recognise stress in themselves and others
- manage their own stress.
- be a champion and ambassador for well-being and act as a role model
- Emphasise with and engage with individuals in their team experiencing stress
- provide emotional support to their staff.
- encourage wellbeing in their workplace.
- identify existing and potential work related common stressors
- to understand policies, processes, wellbeing resources

Managers should be encouraged to take time out to get to know the people in their team, learn about them personally, their home life. When a manager has the trust of the individual the individual is more likely to feel comfortable discussing any problems at home that are causing them to experience stress.

Implement stress risk assessments

The stress risk assessment is designed to look at the job and what it is about the job which causes an employee to feel that their physical and/or emotional needs are under threat.

If you can't use it as a one to one tool, think about using the stress risk assessment as an anonymous questionnaire so you can still gather the information from both employees and managers.

Weaving the stress risk assessment approach through an organisation in team meetings appraisals and at every opportunity, will reduce the sensitivity of difficult issues within an organisation. Issues will be picked up very early and employees will feel that they are heard when they start to feel under threat. This can start gradually and lead to a more open culture in the long term.

A stress risk assessment process might examine a job with the employee to determine if there are likely to be problems in the following areas.

- Demands
- Control
- Support

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- Relationships
- Role
- Change

Remember, it is the job which is being looked at and not the employee. Use the stress risk assessment approach at team meetings and appraisals to check that there are no areas of concern developing for an employee. You can then offer advice and guidance to enable the employee to manage that threat.

Establish two way communication with your employees

Open communication is critical in leadership; keeping employees up to date regarding changes, expectations and their own performance not only keeps them on track but also reduces feelings of stress and anxiety – after all there is nothing worse than being kept in the dark. It is important to keep employees abreast of the latest developments and departmental changes. What's more, open communication is a two way street and the more employers converse with employees, the more likely employees are to share concerns, ideas and thoughts making for much stronger working relationships and a healthier overall company culture.

Improve the work environment

Not many businesses can afford to build its own office, complete with health food restaurants and indoor bike lanes; however there is always room for improvement, particularly when it could boost productivity and overall job satisfaction. Small changes such as a brighter office, more modern office furniture, plants in the office, new pictures – even small changes like new office cutlery and kitchenware will make the working environment conducive to work.

Create Social Activity

Employees spend a lot of time with their co-workers and therefore it's important they get along. The more people enjoy their time at work, the better the atmosphere will be – and a better office atmosphere leads to higher levels of productivity, creativity and collaboration. Setting aside an hour now and again to bring your team together in a fun environment can be great for reducing employee stress, boosting morale and team building. Maybe try finishing early on Friday and providing complimentary drinks and nibbles.

2. Lead by example.

Organisations need leadership that demonstrates commitment to mental health as an asset of the organisation, and one that is critical to achieving business results or strategic outcomes. This needs to cascade from board champions and senior leadership to middle management and then first line supervisors. At each level, leaders need to feel that investing in mental health is a valuable use of their time. At every touch point – whether analysing absence figures in the boardroom or in appraisal and performance management in frontline supervision – leaders need to understand how to engage with mental health.

It is important that individuals across the organisation see that their leaders and managers believe in and practice stress management. Support and get involved in organisational initiatives to tackle stress, for example, encouraging staff to complete questionnaires, attend focus groups or suggest solutions.

HOW LEADERS/MANAGERS CAN IDENTIFY AND HELP STAFF WHO ARE EXPERIENCING STRESS

As a leader you are responsible for establishing the well-being culture of the workplace, and if the culture you are creating is one of long hours and little work/life balance, you are probably sending the wrong message. You need to “walk the walk” not just “talk the talk”, and should actively promote a healthy lifestyle yourself, by having a good work/life balance, managing your working hours, by taking regular breaks during the day, by being physically, by using your full holiday entitlement.

Is your dominant Leadership style a stressor?

Understand your role in creating situations that may cause one or more individuals to experience stress e.g. unrealistic demands.

There are 6 Effective leadership styles as defined by Daniel Goleman in his article "Leadership that gets results."

Each style has a distinct effect on the working atmosphere of a company, division, or team, and, in turn, on its financial performance. The styles, by name and brief description alone, will resonate with anyone who leads, is led, or, as is the case with most of us, does both.

1. Coercive leaders demand immediate compliance.
2. Authoritative leaders mobilize people toward a vision.
3. Affiliative leaders create emotional bonds and harmony.
4. Democratic leaders build consensus through participation.
5. Pacesetter leaders expect excellence and self-direction.
6. Coaching leaders develop people for the future. The research indicates that leaders who get the best results don't rely on just one leadership style; they use most of the styles in any given week.

3. Help the individual to manage their mental health

A limitation to the effectiveness of any help that's offered is the willingness of individual to help themselves.

Provide Life Skills Training

Help individuals to develop the life skills they need to manage their mental health including stress better.

The scope of the training might include:

- Educating employees about the stress process.
- Giving employees the skills to recognise the signs, symptoms, causes and effects of stress
- Giving employees practical effective coping techniques and strategies including: cognitive-behavioural techniques, resilience skills; mindfulness skills, relaxation skills

HOW LEADERS/MANAGERS CAN IDENTIFY AND HELP STAFF WHO ARE EXPERIENCING STRESS

Provide employees with the resources they need to enable them to handle the real or perceived work related 'threats' they face.

Train and support employees to deal with difficult work content or unavoidably difficult organisational issues. Training might include:

- time management
- assertiveness
- decision making
- delegation
- conflict management
- project management
- planning
- focus - managing distractions/disruptions
- goal setting

4. Help individuals to reduce the current level of stress they are experiencing

Provide robust support systems for those who are unable to manage their stress

By making small changes and forming a support structure that suits their workforce, employers can support those with pre-existing mental health conditions as well as reduce the chances of issues developing or escalating for others.

Implement support services that are:

- Anonymous
- Confidential
- Available during work hours and out of hours

For example providing direct access to discreet support online and via phone ensures workers' issues are handled with sensitivity. Employees are more likely to use these services if they are easily available and offered confidentially.

Communicate to employees the support and services the organisation offers. For example:

- EAP services
- childcare services
- flexible working arrangements
- offer them some paid time off to deal with their problems
- family leave policies
- employee assistance programmes
- fitness programmes.

Support services such as Employee Assistance Programmes, confidential telephone or in person counselling are great, however whatever support service you go for – it must be effectively communicated to all employees and managers should actively promote the use of such services!

HOW LEADERS/MANAGERS CAN IDENTIFY AND HELP STAFF WHO ARE EXPERIENCING STRESS

An employer could also provide rehabilitation and support for employees that have suffered from stress-related illness to return to work.

Support is only effective if people know it is available, can utilise it without fear, and find it helpful. Leaders need to promote and encourage their employees to take advantage of the available support services.

An employer can also offer people assistance to manage the non-work related stressors that are causing them to experience stress. e.g. support in the way of paid leave, work from home, counselling.

Liaise with the employee and the employee's doctor or medical specialist.

Offer outside support.

- If appropriate, you could suggest they visit their doctor and allow them time off to do so. You could also suggest support groups.
- Offer access to mental health practitioners and counsellors, or even promoting the use of helplines such as Mind.

Support the employee to identify the source(s) of their stress

Encourage employees to complete a **stress questionnaire** to find out whether they are experiencing any of the symptoms of stress and whether their job contains any of the factors associated with high stress levels.

Encourage individuals to complete an **emotional needs self-assessment** to help identify which of their physical and/or emotional needs is not being met.

The Emotional Needs Model we looked at earlier takes the approach that when a person is meeting their physical and emotional needs to their satisfaction then they will not experience anxiety disorders or chronic stress. When we are meeting our emotional needs life feels rich and fulfilled, we are more productive and happier as a result.

Help and support their employees to meet their individual emotional needs

Set goals that an individual perceives are realistic

Set goals for people that they perceive are realistic. Unrealistic goals may cause an individual to experience stress.

Reduce the pressure the person perceives they are exposed to

Consider what reasonable adjustments can be made to reduce the pressure an individual perceives they are under – for example, adjust the mix of duties, reduce the employee's hours by agreement, suggest alternative, less stressful roles for the employee, provide increased breaks, offer working from an office nearer home or working from home.

Buddy Schemes

Introducing a 'buddy' scheme – whereby every employee has a designated colleague to ask advice and confidential support – will strengthen the organisation and staff, and provide a further understanding of each other's individual pressures at work and home. In addition, businesses can benefit from training staff of all levels to support those with mental health issues in the most appropriate way.

Flexible Working

The flexibility of working from home every once in a while proves highly beneficial in preventing stress-related issues emerging for all workers, and especially those with complex family situations and other health problems.

The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale

In 1967, psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe decided to study whether or not stress contributes to illness. They surveyed more than 5,000 medical patients and asked them to say whether they had experience any of a series of 43 life events in the previous two years.

Each event, called a Life Change Unit (LCU), had a different "weight" for stress. The more events the patient added up, the higher the score. The higher the score, and the larger the weight of each event, the more likely the patient was to become ill.

To complete this test on line click [here](#).

The Stress Scale

The Holmes & Rahe Stress Scale is a well-known tool for measuring the amount of stress you've experienced within the past year. Taking the test can help you see clearly if you're at risk of illness due to stress.

This table is taken from "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale", Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, [Journal of Psychosomatic Research](#), Volume 11, Issue 2, August 1967, Pages 213-218, Copyright © 1967 Published by Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce granted by the publisher.

43 Statements to Answer

Items shaded relate to work events

LIFE EVENT	SCORE
1 Death of spouse (100)	
2 Divorce (73)	
3 Marital separation (65)	
4 Jail term (63)	
5 Death of close family member (63)	
6 Personal injury or illness (53)	
7 Marriage (50)	
8 Fired at work (47)	
9 Marital reconciliation (45)	

HOW LEADERS/MANAGERS CAN IDENTIFY AND HELP STAFF WHO ARE EXPERIENCING STRESS

LIFE EVENT	SCORE
10 Retirement (45)	
11 Change in health of family member (44)	
12 Pregnancy (40)	
13 Sex difficulties (39)	
14 Gain of new family member (39)	
15 Business readjustment (39)	
16 Change in financial state (38)	
17 Death of close friend (37)	
18 Change to a different line of work (36)	
19 Change in number of arguments with spouse (35)	
20 A large mortgage or loan (31)	
21 Foreclosure of mortgage or loan (30)	
22 Change in responsibilities at work (29)	
23 Son or daughter leaving home (29)	
24 Trouble with in-laws (29)	
25 Outstanding personal achievement (28)	
26 Spouse begins or stops work (26)	
27 Begin or end school/college (26)	
28 Change in living conditions (25)	
29 Revision of personal habits (24)	
30 Trouble with boss (23)	
31 Change in work hours or conditions (20)	
32 Change in residence (20)	
33 Change in school/college (20)	
34 Change in recreation (19)	

HOW LEADERS/MANAGERS CAN IDENTIFY AND HELP STAFF WHO ARE EXPERIENCING STRESS

LIFE EVENT	SCORE
35 Change in church activities (19)	
36 Change in social activities (18)	
37 A moderate loan or mortgage (17)	
38 Change in sleeping habits (16)	
39 Change in number of family get-togethers (15)	
40 Change in eating habits (15)	
41 Vacation (13)	
42 Christmas (12)	
43 Minor violations of the law (11)	

Note: If you experienced the same event more than once, then to gain a more accurate total, add the score again for each extra occurrence of the event.

Score Interpretation

Score	Comment
11-150	You have only a low to moderate chance of becoming ill in the near future.
150-299	You have a moderate to high chance of becoming ill in the near future.
300-600	You have a high or very high risk of becoming ill in the near future.