

ALLEVIATING HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS OR DISTRESS AT WORK

For most of us, work is a valuable and often critical part of our lives as we spend a sizeable portion of our daily lives at our respective workplaces. Our work oftentimes is also imperative to our personal identity and self-esteem as it provides us with the sense that we are doing something meaningful and contributing to the world around us. However, for many, the very thought of work can spark the feeling of dread. This newsletter looks at some major sources of job stress as well as suggests steps that organizations and employees can take to alleviate stress in their daily work lives.

Research shows that work is a major contributor to Canadians' overall stress levels. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, 47% of employed Canadians consider work to be the most stressful part of their lives while almost 500,000 Canadians miss work every week because of experiencing a mental health issue (either due to their job or other factors).

Some major stressors at work

- Toxic, abusive, unfair, or unsafe workplace environment
- Lack of support, training, or growth opportunities
- Excessive workloads
- Low salaries or lack of appreciation at work
- Conflict with co-workers or supervisors
- Unfulfilling or unchallenging work



The effect of stress on the employee and the employer

Given that several Canadians miss work due to stress, it is evident that stress would not only be detrimental to an employee's well-being but can also lead to negative consequences for their employers. Some of these effects of stress can include:

- Rise in truancy, lack of productivity and employee engagement
- Decline in quality of work
- Employee(s) may face mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression
- Employee(s) may face other health issues, including insomnia, headaches, short temper, weaker immune system, heart issues including high blood pressure
- Individuals may struggle with getting along with fellow co-workers or supervisors and/or experience workplace conflict



Good stress

While high stress levels can have an adverse effect on one's work life and personal life, it is important to note that some stress is beneficial, even crucial, for employee engagement and work performance. The report, "Psychological Health in the Workplace" by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), talks about how peak performance occurs when an employee experiences an optimal level of stress and therefore feels motivated, challenged, and engaged without feeling overly anxious. Performance is significantly weaker or impaired when stress exceeds the optimal level.



The goal therefore is not to eliminate stress completely but to manage the level of stress that builds confidence and achieve healthy results.

How workplaces can alleviate high stress while ensuring that employees are challenged and engaged

- Examine workplace culture and determine ways to improve levels of employee engagement, workplace relations, and reduce stress
- Establish a system to fairly reward, compensate, and/or appreciate employees for their work
- Employment and Social Development Canada recommends developing workplace psychological health programs and involving employees in their development
- ESDC also recommends establishing an incident-reporting system and a conflict resolution system
- Offer routine training and growth opportunities to employees
- Managers and supervisors should regularly meet with employees to discuss workload, job expectations and responsibilities, and establish reasonable deadlines for projects



How employees can cope with workplace stress

- Identify situations that cause stress and find ways to reduce stress in those situations. For instance, if you notice that you are running late to work most mornings and find yourself often feeling anxious as a result, strive to go to bed earlier and wake up at least 15 minutes earlier in the morning.
- Take frequent short breaks during the workday and do something completely different, i.e. take a short brisk walk, talk to a co-worker, go out for some fresh air, do some stretches, practice mindfulness etc.
- Take a longer break/vacation away from the office. There is a reason why most employers offer paid vacation; breaks help employees decompress and feel rejuvenated so that they are happier and more productive when they return to work.
- Strive to achieve work-life balance. Spend time with family and friends, and do things that bring you joy.
- Learn time-management skills and prioritize tasks that are more important, time-consuming, and challenging.
- Ask for help. If you are struggling with a project or are experiencing other problems at work, talk to your manager and/or a trusted co-worker.
- Report any incident of workplace abuse, harassment, or discrimination.

The Employee and Family Assistance Program can also help employees with developing coping skills for job stress.

YOUR LOGO HERE

For confidential assistance
BCI Consulting Inc. 1.800.668.2055
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