

Stress!

People feel it. Organizations feel it.

Okay, in all honesty, being *completely* stress-free probably is as likely as seeing a unicorn tomorrow; it's the stuff of make-believe. Some level of stress is a given. It occurs in our physical bodies, and in our organizational bodies, as we grapple with change.

In fact, according to 2013 American Psychological Association survey results, some 65% of adults in the U.S. perceived their jobs as a key stressor, with more than a third reporting that stress is a *usual* part of the workday. That pressure showed up in a range of ways for individuals, including an increase in chronic illnesses and mental-health diagnoses. At the organizational level, think of the business hits, absenteeism and presenteeism, toxic cultures, and more that tell stress' story. And, if that was the picture painted back in 2013, imagine what the years since then have wrought for professionals and workplaces alike.

Given that, I've got three questions for you.

1. Can you spot stress in yourself and/or your organization?
2. Do you recognize the true level of stress that you are, or your organization is, under? (Is there just enough tension to get you energized and creative, or is it so great that it's becoming crippling and counterproductive?)
3. Whatever your first two answers, do you have a good grasp on what's behind the stress so that you're in a better position to control or, when possible, eliminate it?

It's one thing to have the sense that "Yes, I am (or my team is) *feeling the heat right about now*". Understanding that stress well enough to prevent it from impeding the goals you're trying to accomplish or the environment you desire to create is something different indeed.

So, what do you do?

Step 1: Admit and Measure the Current Level of Stress

If the truth be told, some people and organizations have been so pressure-packed for so long that strain has become the norm. Anxiety is the rule rather than the exception. Tension...well, it's just to be expected.

For others, the gnawing may be a recent, or only an occasional, occurrence. Because the feeling is new or infrequent, there can be a tendency to ignore it or to push it aside hoping it will just go away in time.

The problem is that stress unaddressed usually does not simply disappear. If left unresolved, the impact is seen in physical and/or emotional health, in individual performance, in damaged organizational culture, and in the bottom line. Accordingly, an acknowledgement of existing stress, coupled with an attempt to grasp the extent of that stress level, becomes critical for person and/or team.

Step 2: Pinpoint the Root

Many of us can sense stress and even, in our own way, assess its level. ("*Absolutely, today measured a 'pull out the Haagen Dazs and fire up Netflix' on the stress meter!*") Where we tend to be less skilled, though, is at getting to the root of why today, or a whole string of todays, actually has been stress-inducing. Unfortunately, without taking this second step, it is impossible to remove or lessen the causes in any consistent manner and, in turn, to control stress' effects. Again, this is true for individuals and organizations alike.

When you step back and assess, though, there tends to be seven factors that contribute most frequently to workplace stress.

Demand: It is not unusual for a job, assignment, client, or season to include demands on a person or group. However, stress moves from the normal-and-moderately-challenging range to debilitating when the demands become excessive; when the workloads are overwhelming; and/or when the tasks are misaligned with the skills, temperaments, or talents of those to whom they are delegated.

investment decisions you make... to your stress levels and overall well-being."
~Peter Diamandis

"Problems can be experienced as... a chance for renewal rather than stress."
~Marilyn Ferguson

"We've all had stress creep up on us without even noticing it until we lost it on someone who didn't deserve it, and then we realize that we probably should have checked in with ourselves a little earlier."
~Ariel Garten

"Whenever we feel stressed out, that's a signal that our brain is pumping out stress hormones. If sustained over months and years, those hormones can ruin our health and make us a nervous wreck."
~Daniel Goleman

"Stress is an important dragon to slay -- or at least tame -- in your life."
~Marilyn Henner

"Stress makes us prone to tunnel vision, less likely to take in the information we need. Anxiety makes us more risk-averse than we would be regularly and more deferential."
~Noreena Hertz

*"I've worried more and more as the years have gone on. The more you're seen to be doing well, the more stress there is. *** [T] here's further to fall."*
~Matthew Macfadyen

"Getting stress out of your life...take[s] action to make changes and stop doing whatever is causing the stress. You can learn to calm down in the way you handle things."
~Joyce Meyer

"Everyone has the ability to increase resilience to stress. It requires hard work and dedication, but over time, you can equip yourself to handle whatever life throws your way without adverse effects to your health. Training your brain to manage stress won't just affect the quality of your life, but

Effort/Reward Balance: In philanthropic moments, people invest time and effort simply for the good of others. At other times, though, the expectation differs; the belief is that reasonable effort deserves reasonable reward. When a reward of proper compensation, promotion, or other acknowledgement fails to occur -- at all or in appropriate balance with the effort expended -- stress is triggered.

Control: Ever have a task assigned but not the accompanying authority or resources to get it done? Ever leave a meeting feeling that nobody heard you or had a clue what you do or how decisions impact you? To sum it up, the feeling likely is that of powerlessness. And, when a person reaches this state, it's no wonder that stress follows.

Organizational Change: There's an old saying that the only thing constant is change. True though that may be, the reality is that people handle change differently. While some thrive on the new and exciting, others are mildly ruffled, and a third group is completely unnerved by it all, making change a stress point to be carefully monitored and managed.

Leaders: Managers and supervisors, themselves, can be the source of stress for individuals or for whole teams. The manner in which the person gives assignments; expresses expectations and/or changes; micromanages; provides, or fails to provide, feedback all can contribute to a tension-filled environment.

Social Support: Whether completing a solo task or group project, nobody wants to feel isolated. Yet, when social support is completely unavailable, or inconsistently available, from one's immediate manager or above and/or from coworkers, the resulting feeling of disengagement often is stress-producing.

Job Security:

- "Is the company on solid footing?"
- "There was no feedback on my last assignment -- good sign or not?"
- "Does being passed up for a promotion mean that a pink slip is next?"
- "What happens if I'm not as good as I should be for that new role?"

The questions that arise -- internally or openly -- reveal a person's concerns about embarrassment, success and dreams, or basic security. And, each one chips away at confidence and raises the temperature on stress.

So, I ask again. Are you stressed? Are you at a mild level or reaching the critical zone? Do you know what's at the root? What's this sense of insecurity costing you personally or organizationally? What will you do with what you know?

If you're not content to remain in the dark regarding those questions, I applaud you. That actually takes you to **Step 3**. Reach out to us at [Executive Advantage](#). Through assessments and other support, we are prepared to join you in uncovering the level and type(s) of stress facing you and/or your team. And, we're ready to help you create and execute a meaningful plan as you seek to lessen the tension and either avoid or reverse its negative effects.

Last question: Are you ready? If so, [contact us today](#).

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perhaps even the length of it."

~Amy Morin

"Successful stress management heavily revolves around combating the building blocks of psychological stress -- a feeling as if you have no control over the adversities in your life, a feeling that you have no predictive information about the stressors, if you lack outlets for the frustrations caused by the stressors, if you have no social support."

~Robert Sapolsky

"It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it."

~Hans Selye

"Stress and worry, they solve nothing. What they do is block creativity. You are not even able to think about the solutions. Every problem has a solution."

~Susan L. Taylor

"If it's stress of things that we cannot control, what you have to do is you mitigate that stress as much as possible. You've planned, you've trained, you've done everything you can in your power to mitigate the stress that's facing you. And then after that, there's nothing you can do. So, you have to let that one go."

~Jocko Willink

*"Everyone has a breaking point, turning point, stress point...
*** But internally, for a guy to be successful, you have to be like a clock spring, wound but not loose at the same time."*

~Dave Winfield

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