

Managing Through Pressured Times: Recognising stress in yourself and those you manage

1st December 2020

Managers who recognise the pressures people are under and who make efforts to ease these pressures in the workplace have more productive and committed teams.

Many things can cause workplace stress. Change and reorganisation, tight deadlines, understaffing, overwork, information overload, new technologies, problems with team dynamics, and the rapid pace of 24/7 work all contribute to high levels of pressure in today's workplace. Employees and managers alike may feel under pressure, sometimes a great deal of pressure, given these conditions. The cost to Australian employers in lost productivity and turnover is estimated at \$14 billion per year.

Some pressure is good. Research has shown that when it's acute and short-lived—not chronic—stress primes the brain for improved performance. But very soon, as pressure becomes a prolonged state, it instead suppresses important brain activity. Too much pressure adversely affects our health, wellbeing, and productivity. This is true for both you and the people you manage.

How pressure and stress affect us

Begin by becoming familiar with the signs of pressure and stress that you notice in yourself and others. The signs include:

- an increase in work-related complaints
- negative comments about co-workers, management, or customers
- being less focused and taking longer to complete tasks
- making more mistakes than usual
- being irritable or short-tempered
- an increase in physical complaints
- a rise in absenteeism

First, take care of yourself

Before you can help employees manage feelings of pressure and stress, you must first take care of yourself. Flight attendants always advise parents to put on their own oxygen masks before helping their children put on theirs. The same logic applies here: You'll be a more

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effective and engaged manager, and a better role model if you take care of yourself. Here are some suggestions:

Develop relationships with people you can turn to for support. These might be colleagues, friends, mentors, or family members, as well as a counsellor or therapist. Pressure can build up and be harder to manage when you try to handle it on your own.

Be aware of how many hours you're working. Plan your time so that you can accomplish your work goals while making time for yourself. Don't overload your day; avoid back-to-back scheduling.

Be aware of the symptoms and signs of stress in yourself. Then be deliberate about managing these feelings. Signs of stress to watch for in yourself include:

- depression
- fatigue
- feeling nervous, anxious, irritable, or on edge
- lower productivity at work
- overeating, or having no appetite
- stomach pain, upset stomach, or headache
- tearfulness or frequent crying
- tense muscles or shallow breathing
- trouble concentrating
- trouble falling asleep or going back to sleep once awakened
- using alcohol or drugs to cope
- withdrawing from family or friends

Get exercise and find ways to relax. Both are excellent ways to reduce feelings of pressure and stress.

Take advantage of the programs and benefits your employer offers to help you reduce stress.

Seek professional help if you're feeling under too much pressure or if symptoms of stress

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persist. Contact your doctor or your assistance program or other confidential counselling services available to you. Talk with your health care provider if you're concerned about any aspect of your physical or mental health.

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