

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Controlling Stress at Work

As humans, we have a need to be able to predict stressful events and their eventual outcome. We want to have some control over what happens and we need and appreciate the emotional support other people can provide when we are facing stressful times. While we can't always control our circumstances, we can always control our reactions and attitudes about our situation. One positive way to gain a sense of control is to give tasks 100 percent of your concentration and effort. Find value in the work you do and find ways to make it challenging. If you are involved, you will feel much less frustrated and you will be too committed to what you are doing to feel bored.

Set priorities for your goals at work and at home. Do the things necessary to achieve your goals. You do not have to accept all requests to be on committees or be involved in dozens of groups that require large contributions of your time. Learn to decline firmly when necessary. If you make exceptions, do so in your personal life, especially in relation to your spouse, children, and friends. Few dying people wish they had spent more of their time working, but many wish they had spent more time with family and loved ones. Reach for your professional goals, but if you are blessed with a family and friends, do not neglect them. Finding the appropriate balance between your work and personal lives can make you better able to contribute to both endeavors than if you emphasize only one side of the equation.

Compensating for Personality Differences

Your personality characteristics can influence how easy of a time you have coping with work stress. Some people are driven achievers, while others take a more laid-back approach to life. Driven people are more likely to suffer health problems because of stress and find the work place more stressful than less ambitious people do. The ambitious person's expectations, and therefore the amount of stress they experience, often become magnified. Ambitious people serve themselves by recognizing their driven tendencies and compensate for them with relaxation and reality-testing activities that help them calm down and set expectations that are more manageable. Vague goals can be recast into clear and relevant objectives and plans. It is best to reexamine goals while in a calm state of mind-when you are neither panicked nor driven by uncontrolled ambition.

Another common work stressor is the fear that something you did or said will come back to haunt you. Try not to waste too much time on minor issues that will probably never amount to anything. Keep an eye on your ego and any tendency to become inappropriately insecure. Resolve to do your best to repair work relationships if they do go sour, and not to worry about what is otherwise out of your control. Instead of dwelling on these "what if?" scenarios, work towards developing a positive attitude toward work, work relationships, and yourself.

Take positive steps to manage your work-related fears. If your major fear is losing your job or being trapped in a job you do not find fulfilling, try saving money from each paycheck so that over time, you develop a cash buffer sufficient to grant you the freedom to leave your current position or survive a layoff. You might also find that making time to keep your employability skills up-to-date and your network of business-related contacts well oiled pays off in less work-related anxiety and better sleep. Regarding work-related skills, take advantage of training programs offered through your employer and look for additional ones on your own. If catastrophe strikes, you will be as ready as you can be. Knowing this can relieve an enormous amount of stress.

Getting Along with Other People

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A big stressor at work involves problems people have in relating with other people, whether bosses, subordinates, colleagues, or customers. Some of the most common causes for these sorts of problems are competitiveness, anger, and envy. Be aware that such feelings may be motivating your current behavior. Having become aware of your perceptions and feelings, you are now in a position to alter how you are participating in the stressful relationship so that it becomes less stressful.

When it comes to dealing with an overbearing employer, an unresponsive subordinate, or an unrealistic supervisor, the problem sometimes boils can be assertiveness issues (e.g., you end up being too passive or too aggressive in your dealings with others). Your Human Resources department or Employee Assistance Program can direct you toward training resources that can help you learn how to assert yourself appropriately in the workplace.

Dealing with Change

Be willing to accept change as inevitable. New technologies and methods of getting things done are par for the course, necessary adaptations that employers make as they attempt to keep the business current and viable. Instead of griping about having to learn new things, do what you can to approach them with a positive attitude and an open mind, and don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it. You will be amazed at how accomplished you feel when you develop mastery of a new skill or technology.

Sometimes work-related change means that your position could be consolidated or otherwise lost. Alternatively, your employment may require to you make significant life changes in order to keep your position. Any change that requires you to make major life changes may seem negative, but this is not always the case. In many cases, what seems to be negative reveals itself over time to have positive aspects. You may find yourself in a new position that you enjoy more than before, or you may meet new people who become your friends. Giving inevitable change the benefit of the doubt and approaching it with a positive attitude helps you to cope better and more successfully than if you try to cling to a past that is no more. What you will gain is certain calmness about the future because you are able to see its potential.