

# MANAGING STRESS IN DIFFICULT TIMES

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Many industries and workplaces are dealing with serious challenges in the coming months and even years. A large number of building and construction businesses are facing uncertain futures with additional pressures put on management. While managers are dealing with a number of priorities, it is essential to maintain a focus on the health and wellbeing of staff. Many employees are struggling with significant stress brought about by a combination of pressures at home and at work. Employers cannot usually protect workers from stress arising outside of work, but they can provide essential support and protect them from additional stress that arises through work.

Work stress is recognised world-wide as a major challenge to employees' health and the healthiness and performance of their organisations. Workers who are stressed are more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work. The negative outcomes of employee stress are only likely to further compound the issues that businesses are currently facing, so it is very important to maintain productivity, motivation and innovation through positive leadership.

Good management and good work organisation are the best forms of stress prevention at work. Managers should understand, be aware and ensure employees understand the effects of stress on individuals and more broadly for workgroups.

Leaders can identify stress by observing behaviour such as increasing irritability, worrying and anxiety in individuals. Stress can also be evident in loss of concentration, tiredness, poor decision-making and emotional outbursts.

Other behaviours linked to harmful stress can include apparent inability to relax, less enjoyment in work, loss

of interest in social activities, excessive use of alcohol, smoking and other drugs, uncharacteristic errors, mistakes and poor punctuality.

Managers can also find evidence of stress by tracking data such as increasing absenteeism, lower performance and productivity, increasing unsafe working practices, accident rates and increasing complaints from clients and customers.

The more support workers receive from others at work the less likely they are to experience work stress. It is very important to identify issues early and to address them through team interventions or one on one discussions.

The best way of finding out if employees have problems at work and why, is simply to ask them. Listen to the person you are supporting and the problems or concerns they have. A good leader should acknowledge their concerns, tell them what they are able to do or the options they could consider and encourage them with a positive comment, or some assurance about their reaction.

Additionally, the more involvement workers have in their business and can participate in decisions that concern their jobs, the less-likely they are to feel powerless and experience work stress. It is very important to be open with communication about any issues the organisation is facing and consult with staff about how they can better work together to improve the overall business situation.

In best cases, organisations will be able to use the economic slow down to rebuild, innovate, upgrade their capability and skills and put themselves in the best possible position to weather the current economic situation and to grow in the future.

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