Tip Sheet: Managing Employee Stress

Employee stress can take many forms and have a significant impact on both individuals and organizations. It can manifest as anxiety, aggression, irritability, dependency, withdrawal, or depression. Regardless of the form it takes, stress results in reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, employee burnout, high turnover, increased medical expenses, health insurance costs, and stress-related compensation claims.

**Work to counter stress.**
It is important for companies and their managers to begin to treat workplace stress like any other work-related health concern by taking an active stance to prevent and manage it. Simply dealing with the symptoms of stress when they arise isn’t enough. It is also important to address the causes.

**The first step is identifying sources of stress in your organization.**
Possible stressors include high workloads, organizational changes, lack of employee control, the organization’s culture and operating style, emphasis on competition, fears of job loss, increased technology, and the push for multitasking. The best ways to gauge the sources of stress are to observe trends during high stress periods, and to speak with employees.

**Once you have identified your workplace stressors, you can take steps to alter or eliminate those elements.**
- Review and work to change policies, procedures, and practices that undermine employees’ personal power, sense of control, or motivation.
- Make changes in the work environment that increase employee involvement and give them as much control as possible over their tasks. Involve them in setting goals, making decisions, and solving problems.
- Adopt new cultural and communication styles that encourage open sharing of ideas and that avoid misperceptions.
- Make sure employees are clear about expectations, what tasks and activities take priority, and why.
- Keep employees apprised of changes and how those changes will affect their work in both the long and short term.
- Supply employees with the resources needed to get the job done.
- Consider physical changes in the work environment to make it more comfortable and user-friendly.

**Building Resilience**
Helping employees learn to cope with personal stress, to balance their home and work lives, and to build stress resistance can benefit everyone.
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There is evidence that strong stress management skills result in improved ability to cope with work pressures. Consider helping employees by doing the following things:

- Offer training programs that teach stress management techniques, relaxation, time management, positive thinking, and assertiveness.
- Institute flexible work schedule or telecommuting options if possible.
- Be flexible, within reason, in allowing employees to take time away from work to deal with personal and family issues. Unresolved personal, health, and family problems are a considerable source of stress.
- Consider providing a relaxation space in your workplace.
- Be aware of yourself as a role model. Try to demonstrate good coping and stress reduction behaviors.
- Encourage and support employee self-care efforts by promoting the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle and the building and use of solid support systems. This includes SupportLinc, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

**Be aware of the danger signals of acute stress.**

Chronic anxiety, apathy, feelings of hopelessness, withdrawal, alcohol or drug problems, or depression all can indicate the need for immediate help. When an employee is in acute stress, the situation may warrant a call by the manager to the SupportLinc EAP to decide how best to proceed.

All organizations will have some degree of stress among their employees. Stress is a part of life. The keys are in seeking solutions that target the sources of workplace stress, and teaching people to cope with those personal and professional stressors that are inevitable. Offer your employees a variety of stress prevention and management techniques. Doing so will benefit your employees and your organization.