How Supervisors Can Reduce Work Stress

Stress at work is something we all experience at times. When you cope with a healthy manner, it can serve as a source of motivation. However, when stress is chronic and not addressed it may result in lower productivity, lost work days, and higher staff turnover. As a manager/supervisor, your response to work stress can help mitigate the negative impact of stress on your staff.

Be a positive role model. Practice good communication skills and remain calm under stress. Your direct reports look to you in gauging their own response to a stressor. If you don’t panic, chances are they won’t either.

Consult with your direct reports. This may take place in a formal meeting but may also happen informally. The key to obtaining useful information is to ask specific questions about their work. “Tell me how this new piece of equipment ...how is this new process impacting...what have you noticed that isn’t working with...” Leaders should know the problems facing staff.

Deal with conflicts quickly and respectfully. Don’t ignore or wait for conflict to reach a crisis point. Clearly define work and behavior expectations and treat employees fairly.

Allow for flexibility. Where appropriate and realistic, give direct reports some control over how work tasks get done. Avoid overly micromanaging how and when tasks get done. Workers are more productive and able to deal with stress better if they have some control over and flexibility in how they perform their work.

Encourage breaks. Generally people are most productive if they work in 90-minute spurts punctuated by 20-minute breaks. Encourage employees to eat healthy snacks, walk or simply read a book during breaks. These breaks allow us to re-energize and tackle the rest of the day.

Promote City resources and benefits. Know the various training, health & wellness and financial programs offered. Consider spending part of a team meeting reminding and educating employees of these various programs. A good place to start is the Department of Employee Relations webpage:
https://www.milwaukee.gov/der

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80% of workers feel stress on the job and nearly half say they need help in learning how to manage stress—The American Institute of Stress, January 2018
Introducing the DPW Peer Support Team

Many times the first person we go to when we have a problem is not a professional counselor, doctor or even family member. Often we reach out to someone like us, someone that would best understand what we are going through.

- A Peer Support Team aims to provide a safe, non-judgmental, confidential avenue for employees to connect with trained peers who understand the unique stressors of the work environment.

- A Peer Support Team Member is a confidential resource for an employee experiencing a crisis, work or non-work related, a “listening ear” and healthy wellbeing advocate that connects employees to other available help when needed.

Peer support members are:

1. Motivated to help others
2. Employee volunteer
3. Certified in Mental Health First Aid ©
4. Available for employees at all hours
5. Committed toward the wellbeing of their peers and Peer Support mission statement

City of Milwaukee DPW employees may contact the team members directly for support:

Tom Udee: 414-534-1051
Sharon Garrison: 414-708-1489
Ursella Turner: 414-708-4157
Eunice Thomas: 414-708-7473
Nicole Lawrence: 414-708-2169
Tami Smith: 414-708-2623
Roger Davidson: 414-708-1251
Sara Dupree: 414-409-3437

For questions, contact Employee Assistance & Resource Coordinator, Cris Zamora, at 414-286-3145

How to Work
With a Micromanager

When employees present with a manager/supervisor problem, it is usually one where the employee feels micromanaged.

- Micromanagers tend to “hover” over you.
- Usually dictate exactly how they want something done and will double and triple check.
- Tend to demand your full attention when you are busy or attending to another task.

At the same time, micromanagers have great attention to detail, are usually hands on and drive everyone around them to succeed.

Micromanagers like to control time and process. As an employee we need to instill trust that tasks/projects are getting done on time and accurately.

- Take the initiative. Don’t wait to be asked. Find out what your manager needs to feel confident/comfortable, then get it to him/her ahead of time.
- Communicate. Show him/her that you got it covered. Communicate timelines, task awareness and report progress routinely. Preempt deadlines.
- Seek clarification. Instead of guessing and doing something incorrectly.
- Avoid cutting corners. Adhere to policies, procedures and don’t be an easy target for discipline.
- Lastly, pick your battles. You don’t have to go “toe-to-toe” on everything. Instead, choose the battles most important to you.
How to Deal With a Negative Co-worker

Sometimes called “negative Neds” or “Debbie downers”, every department has that one (or more) employees that seem to complain about every aspect of the job. Their complaints are often all encompassing, from the boss is incompetent, to the work load is unrealistic, their co-workers don’t care, and nothing is ever good enough. As a co-worker, you may spend a significant time of the day listening to a seemingly endless negative rant. This is troublesome because we know that mood is contagious and this behavior can ultimately affect your own workplace moral. While we can’t control someone else’s behavior, there are tips that may help. The first step is to determine if the negativity is occasional or regular.

**The Occasional Complainer**

First, actively listen. Ask questions and give the speaker your full attention. Paraphrase what you’ve heard. **People often repeat or otherwise go on-and-on when they don’t feel listened to and understood.** Help that co-worker feel listened to by clarifying and summarizing.

Second, determine if their complaint sounds legitimate. Is there cause for the person to feel negative? If it does, ask if they want help problem-solving. This problem solving must remain short-term in nature. You are not responsible for “fixing” it. Some short-term solutions include discussing with a supervisor, management, HR personnel, EAP or identifying professional development trainings. It is important to remember that your role is to direct the co-worker to the next place that may be helpful and not providing on-going advice and responsibility.

If your co-worker doesn’t want any help and simply wants to complain to a friendly ear, listen, but set limits. Listening to long-term complaining saps your own energy and outlook. You may need to tell your coworker that you’d prefer to move on to a different topic because you don’t want to also feel negative. This will require you to be assertive.

If the complaining and negativity doesn’t sound legitimate, additional assertiveness will be needed.

You may need to tell your co-worker that while the situation appears one way to him/her, your assessment is different. You may expect the co-worker will attempt to convince you otherwise. Again, if you believe the negativity is unwarranted, don’t spend your time listening or helping the coworker to address the negative feelings. You will only encourage long-term and ever-growing negative feelings and, potentially, behavior. You will set yourself up as a negativity magnet. Constant negative interactions will eventually permeate your interaction with your workplace. You could become the negative person, too.

**The Regular Complainer**

Genuinely negative people do exist and misery really does love company. Every negative person has a story to tell. Don’t allow your attitude to be impacted by listening to the negative stories and grievances. Listening will only reinforce the negativity.

If you are forced to work with a negative person, set firm limits. This may mean separating yourself physically and limiting time spent with that co-worker. Do not allow yourself to become drawn into negative discussions. Tell the negative coworker, you prefer to think about your job differently. If all else fails, talk to your own manager or human resource personnel. They may have other resources and ideas. Failure to address with management may place your own performance and work attitude at risk. Be ready to specifically identify how the co-worker’s negativity is directly impacting you at work (e.g. attending to tasks, performance/productivity or presenteeism). Always keep it job related.
One Minute Mindfulness

We live in busy world and finding 30 minutes for meditation would be challenging for most. Fortunately, simply spending one minute of mindfulness may be enough to feel recharged.

**Mindful Observation**

Choose a natural object around you. It can be a plant, flower, cloud or sky. Notice it for 1-2 minutes. Be curious, notice everything about it without judging or labeling. Look at it as if for the very first time. If your mind wanders, and it will, acknowledge it and bring your attention back to the object.

**The Anxious Ball of Yarn**

This mindful exercise uses a visualization and may help unwind after a stressful day.

Picture a small ball of yarn holding all of the day’s stress and tension. Imagine holding the end of the string and with your other hand slowly pushing the ball of yarn away and unrolling. As the ball unwinds and moves further away, allow yourself to feel tension unwinding. When the yarn is completely unraveled, you can relax and enjoy the night.

EAP Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to assist employees who develop behavioral/emotional problems that may directly affect their work performance, and to provide Key Personnel with policy and procedural guidelines for the management of these problems.

City of Milwaukee Events and Reminders

- **Not feeling well?** Visit the [Workplace Clinic](#) (841 N. Broadway, Milwaukee, WI 53202 (Zeidler Municipal Building) for FREE onsite health care services. Call 414-777-3413 for information or to schedule an appointment.

- **Free screening, consultation, and education services to prevent and treat potential musculoskeletal injuries.** Schedule an appointment with a physical therapist at the [Injury Prevention Clinic](#). Call 414-777-3413 to schedule an appointment.

- **Health4Me™** is a UnitedHealthcare (UHC) mobile app that provides instant access to your family’s critical health information, anytime/anywhere. Find a physician, check the status of a claim or speak directly with a healthcare professional.

Sleep Hygiene Checklist

Sleep hygiene includes the habits you have around going to bed. Some habits make it harder to fall asleep, while others are conducive to getting a good night’s rest.

1. **Relax before bed.** Engage in relaxing activities for at least 30 minutes before sleep. Listening to calming music or reading are good choices.

2. **Avoid electronics** 30 minutes before going to bed and do NOT use in bed.

3. **Keep bedroom dark.** Close curtains and blinds to prevent outdoor light.

4. **Use bed for sleep.** Don’t use your bed for other activities like watching TV, playing games, or chatting.

5. **Don’t associate your bed with tossing and turning.** Rest in a chair until sleepy, then return to bed.

6. **Keep daytime naps short.** Limit daytime naps to no more than 20-30 minutes.

EAP Contact Information

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Scan Me!