



The High Cost of Stress

How stress impacts your business--plus 10 simple ways to help you and your employees ditch the worry and move on

In Alliance With



By **Jim White, PhD**

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Stress costs U.S. businesses \$300 billion annually, according to The American Institute of Stress (<http://stress.org>). What's startling is that this statistic is not new, or even related to the current economy. It is the norm.

Certainly the construction world has its stresses: Clients are demanding more for less. Contractors are in a never-ending parade to get more work. This often means bid after bid coming in second or third. The dealership down the road just closed its doors. Many OEMs are struggling, too. But, in some cases it's because they have become part of the problem without realizing it. Employees fear losing their jobs and the ability to provide for their families. Uncertainty starts to pile up in all corners, for employers and employees, becoming a major factor in the way your business performs. Ongoing stress can weigh you down at a time when there is already little room for error.

So what's the solution? In a slow economic recovery like we are experiencing, you need to come up with a plan that will move you ahead long-term. As I've said in previous articles, the tendency is to adopt crisis-mode behaviors that give some kind of immediate relief. Hey, people are hurting. But, coming up with a plan that will help you now and later is the ideal.

Here's what's at stake. Researchers at Rockefeller University in New York (<http://rockefeller.edu>) have spent years in the lab detailing how stress shows up in your body. During episodes of acute stress, stress hormones provide a protective function by activating the body's defenses. But when these same protective hormones are produced repeatedly or in excess as a reaction to chronic stress, they create a gradual and steady cascade of harmful physiological changes.

These changes include everything from bone loss, muscular weakening, memory loss, atherosclerosis, and increased insulin levels that cause higher levels of fat deposits in the body. At the office, these changes surface as conflicts between employees, increased "acting out" episodes or blow-ups, teams that suddenly become dysfunctional and more easily overwhelmed by workloads. There are more sick days, too.

A company is in business to make money, and to be productive. To do that, you need to take care of your people. The first step is to realize that most people fall into one of two camps when it comes to dealing with stress: safety seekers or opportunity seekers. Whenever there is fear in the system like there is with this economy, people start moving into that safety-seeking camp like refugees.

To solve the problem, you may be inclined to cut yourself and your people some slack.

Article Continued...



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But, do exactly the opposite. Rev up. Pick up the pace. This is one instance where the slow recovery can generate a new behavior that works in your favor. Here are five simple ways to start transforming stress, worry, and uncertainty into renewed energy that makes its way right back to your bottom line.

What Employers Can Do:

1. Keep communicating your vision, mission, and values--the "why" behind the work you do as a team
2. Make sure every employee knows how he or she contributes to the success of the company
3. Give goals specific deadlines. Nothing is as energizing as seeing progress and being part of that effort
4. Make sure every employee is in what I call "the right person for the right job at the right time"
5. Lead by example to create leaders and learners at every level of the organization

What Employees Can Do:

1. Bring more of yourself to work--strengths and weaknesses--to grow as a person and a professional
2. Become a continuous learner--ask questions, take on the tough projects, request training
3. Always be innovating, the one to save time and cut costs
4. Focus on the customer first and go beyond what's expected--it is as gratifying to you as it is to them
5. Hold yourself accountable to goals--you gain a sense of control when you lead

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