



“Stressful events, situations and circumstances may be out of your control, but how you experience stress *is* in your control.”

Dr. Ellen Contente

Stress in the Workplace

The World Health Organization has classified stress as the “health epidemic of the 21st century.” Over 80% of the workforce is suffering from stress-related conditions, 25% are on the verge of burning out, and less than 40% of those that ask for help receive it from their employers.

According to the WHO, work stressors come in the form of dysfunctional work contents; work hours, job control, and work pace. The other form includes context, such as job insecurity, work-life balance, organizational culture, and managerial support.

Stress negatively impacts how we perform and function both in the workplace and in our daily lives. A recent survey conducted by Colonial Life showed 41% of workers say stress has caused a drop in work

productivity, while 15% say increasing pressure at work has pushed them into looking for other jobs.

What do the stats tell us? We are progressively getting more stressed at work! Our bosses annoy us, there is too much work, and time is short. And when things get out of control, the human and financial costs of work-related stress are exponential. All of these stressors add up and businesses lose up to \$300 billion dollars a year due to stress-related issues.

The current COVID-19 Pandemic have certainly had an extraordinary impact on our stress levels. These rising levels of stress at work are closely connected to shifts in the global economy that have resulted in decreased financial and job security.

Solutions

Hearth-Centered Programs has delivered hundreds of ‘Stress Management’ programs to organizations, corporations and higher educational institutions. What we have found is that while these programs have been well attended and received, without a plan to apply the strategies and programs presented, within a very short period of time, inevitably things return to ‘Business as Usual’. People continue to be stressed out and eventually will ‘check-out’.

In my experience, a ‘One-and-Done’ training approach that ‘checks the box’ for employee well-being training, falls short in meeting its objective. At best it brings awareness to the importance of managing one’s stress. At worst it makes people feel that management only cares about the bottom-line and not the welfare of their employees.

To maximize the investment in a stress management program, two things need to be addressed. **One** - there must be personal accountability and a willingness to implement stress-management strategies, and **two** - there must be an institutional commitment to an ongoing stress-management ‘practice’ within the organization. It must be a sustained effort promoted and practiced at all levels of the organization. Leaders and management need to be good role models for managing stress and creating a more positive work/life balance culture.

Successful companies have corporate wellness initiative that is carried out across all divisions and departments. Wellness programs serve as effective preventive measures and “shock absorbers” for workplace stress. There is a myriad of wellness initiatives managers can incorporate into the workplace to ensure employees maintain optimal mental and physical performance.

Whether you develop your own stress-management program or hire an outside vendor, be aware of these areas where stress is costing your workforce and your bottom-line. The best approach for a comprehensive stress-management program is three-fold: Prevention, Early Intervention, and Post-Stress Remedies.

The Hidden Costs of Stress

#1 Hidden Cost: *Overtime*

The impact of overtime work found that there is a decreasing return on overtime costs. Companies are spending money for overtime productivity with diminishing returns on their 'investment' and increasing rates of burnout due to the additional hours and time employees are working.

A study using panel data for eighteen industries in the United States found that the use of overtime hours lowers average output per hour worked for almost all the industries in the sample. A 10 % increase in overtime results in a 2.4 % decrease in productivity.

Other studies show that almost 40 % of those in the workforce consider quitting their jobs because of overwork and excessive workloads.

Workplace stress and lost productivity statistics indicate that it can cost up to 75% of a worker's yearly salary to cover productivity costs or to hire new workers.

#2 Hidden Cost: *Health-Care*

Both the human and financial costs of stress are enormous. Statistics for workplace stress show that around 120,000 people die each year from work-related stress. The cost of stress in the workplace also drains the US budget, resulting in healthcare costs of around \$190 billion per year. This represents between 5% and 8% of the total national healthcare spending.

The largest excess health-care costs were due to high job demands, with a total of \$46 billion in annual excess health-care cost.

#3 Hidden Cost: *Absenteeism*

Work-related stress causes over one million workers to call in sick daily. According to some data, if a worker takes a sick day due to stress or other mental health issues, they are seven times more likely to take additional sick days than a worker with physical issues.

Stress-related illness statistics reveal that the cost of lost productivity due to being away from work was over \$84 billion. It's easy to see how costly stress is to an organization in comparison to other health-related illnesses.

#4 Hidden Cost: *Worrying*

Stress not only affects productivity by worsening the quality and rate of work performed; it also takes up a significant portion of employees' work time. More than 20% of workers involved in a survey said that they spend more than five hours weekly thinking about what stresses them.

The majority of US employees, about 80 percent stated they spend anywhere from 12 to 20 hours per month thinking about financial worries at work.

Conclusion

Work place stress affects over 80% of workers and it is costing businesses billions of dollars annually. Specific stressors are varied, as are stress responses and consequences.

It is imperative that organizations implement a corporate wellness initiative with comprehensive and ongoing stress-management programs.

Heart-Centered Programs can work with you to design a comprehensive stress-management program is three-fold: Prevention, Early Intervention, and Post-Stress Remedies.

Dr. Ellen Contente is a trusted advisor to global brands in creating a healthier workplace. She is the President/Founder of Heart-Centered Programs, a national Women Owned Training, Coaching and Speaking organization offering Wellness programs for Stress Management. Her programs are tailored, interactive, and filled with hands-on activities and valuable content.

Participants benefit from her expertise and companies realize improved morale, increase satisfaction and efficiency, while inspiring people to work with more ‘Passion, Purpose, and Play’™.

Partial client list includes: City of Los Angeles, Honda, Toyota, Ernst & Young Claremont Colleges, CDC, USC, Los Angeles Community Colleges, Verity Health System, L’Oreal, Bunim-Murray Productions, In N Out Burgers, Optum, Humana, Managed Health Network, and others.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

- <https://www.stress.org/42-worrying-workplace-stress-statistics>
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stephaniedenning/2018/05/04/what-is-the-cost-of-stress-how-stress-is-the-business-worlds-silent-killer/#572bb7f36e06>
- <https://www.stepjockey.com/workplace-stress-a-21st-century-health-epidemic>