

Stress Management in the Workplace

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How to Handle Stress in the Workplace

It is no secret that the workplace holds many opportunities for stressful situations to occur. How you handle those stresses is the key to your survival and growth within an organization and as a person. Switching jobs when things become challenging at your current company leads to a resume that shows instability and unreliability and it takes a lot of explaining to convince an employer that you aren't a flake. Here are some common stresses we can experience in the workplace and some ideas on how to successfully get through them:

1. My boss and/or co-worker is a jerk - At one point or another I think we have all been in a situation where a boss or co-worker's behavior makes the daily experience less than tolerable. While you might feel like lashing out against this person, and they might very well deserve it, the workplace is not the best place to get verbally 'UFC' on somebody. Companies err on the side of caution when witnessing any type of confrontation and equally reprimand both people regardless of who is right or wrong. Therefore you must maintain composure and avoid taking the immediately more-satisfying path of spontaneous retribution. Initially, consult your company's manual to fully understand the process of how to deal with this situation. Once it is evident that someone has become a problem for you, make sure to document all incidences, so you can clearly communicate your points to Human Resources. When making these types of declarations in an official capacity, not having your ducks in a row, will make you appear emotional, irrational, and unfounded in your concerns, and you will not be taken seriously. Also, be sure not to spout off to other co-workers within or outside of your department about this person. You never know who their friends might be outside of the workplace or perhaps they haven't yet learned the virtue of discretion.
2. The company is in financial trouble - Rumors fly around the workplace like a bad joke, so before taking action make sure what you are hearing is true. If it turns out that the company is losing money, don't assume that means your job is toast. Do a little legwork to get the facts. Whether it is asking your boss, Human Resources, or simply checking the Internet to see what the experts are saying, be sure not to automatically go along with the wrong assumption. Sometimes companies will intentionally spread that type of rumor to "thin out the herd". It is much easier, and cheaper, to have employees leave for other jobs instead of having to lay them off and pay a severance.
3. Job description changes - As an employee it is absurd to think that you won't be taking on additional tasks outside the boundaries of the official job description. In fact, if you aren't being asked to take on added responsibility, it is likely an indication that your employer isn't considering you to be promoted any time soon. That being said, there is a point when it obviously crosses the line into being unfair. Some bosses pile on work until you can't take it anymore, under the assumption that you can easily be replaced with someone else. After you finish primal scream therapy in your car, it is time to turn this negative into a positive. Sit down at home and create a list of everything you do that is outside of your official job description. How many of your boss's tasks are you handling currently? Having taken on these responsibilities, what value have you added to your department, other departments, and the corporation? Once you have finished this list it is time to update that resume. Hold on though. I am not suggesting you do this so you leave your company for a new job, at least not yet. Initially this document will be used to apply for other internal corporate positions or, if there isn't any room for promotion, to show your boss what you do that warrants a pay increase and title change.

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4. Passed over for promotion - You have been with your company for 10 years and the guy who just started last year was just promoted to the position you also applied for three different times. What do you do? Do you "get the message" and immediately throw yourself into the market for a new job? Perhaps you do eventually, however there are usually a few steps you should consider first. As uncomfortable as it might be, contact the hiring manager by phone not email, and invite him/her to lunch. If they don't seem comfortable with that idea then request a meeting for 15-30 minutes onsite. Be as pleasant as possible in this invite, not showing the slightest hint of bitterness or frustration. The manager will most likely assume that you either want to berate and insult them or beg for the job you didn't get. This however is not the case.

At the meeting, you'll want to express appreciation for taking time with you and say, "I am pleased you found the right person for the 'XYZ' position. Needless to say, I was a bit disappointed but am sure that you saw things in the other candidate that led you to believe they would provide better value to the company. I wanted to meet with you today in order to gain a better understanding of what I can do in my role so I am considered a more value-added employee." Any good hiring manager will be impressed at your initiative, maturity, and class. Odds are that you will take them by surprise so while they are searching for the words, stay silent.

5. Co-worker is being paid more than you Waiting on hold for a customer, your eyes aimlessly wander around the office until, like flypaper, it sticks to the paycheck stub on a co-worker's desk in your group. The gross amount is significantly more than yours and they perform the exact same tasks you do. Plus they have been there less time! Before you look like a fool running to your boss, get the facts. Does the person have a college degree or some type of advanced education that you don't have? Even though you are doing the same job right now, having the advanced education will allow that person to be promoted to other areas in the organization, thereby making them more valuable to the company.

Likewise, it is also important that you consider the co-worker's prior work experience. They may have only been at your company for a short time, but in their previous positions they very well might have gained more experience than you have. Companies aren't in the habit of throwing excess money at their employees unless they anticipate a better return on that investment. Instead of arguing about your worth versus theirs, it is time to consider upgrading your skills and education. Obtaining your college degree, industry-related certifications, or learning more about your industry will improve your chances of career growth within the organization.

Over time, as you are able to apply your newfound knowledge, good employers will recognize your commitment to excellence, and as a result, will shift their perspective of you to a high-potential employee. As cliché as it may sound, it is important to look at challenges at work, not simply as stresses but as opportunities for improvement and growth.