Stress: six ways to beat it

It’s tempting to think that a certain level of stress is unavoidable in the modern working environment. There are the multiple demands of increasing workloads, managers’ expectations, and the constant stream of information through new technologies that can keep us connected to the office twenty-four-seven.

However, there are proactive techniques that you can use to stop pressure from turning into stress. In this download we’ve put together a list of tips that can help to combat stress and maintain a positive level of pressure at work.

1. Keep a stress diary

The starting point for anyone combating stress is to recognise which situations commonly cause it.

Keeping a log of when and why you have felt particularly stressed will help you to address specific issues, rather than feeling powerless to tackle the problem. Your diary may show a common thread, such as the need to prioritise better or to take a breaks at particular times in the working week.

2. Try a little mindfulness: concentrate on one task at a time

Always looking to the next job on your to-do list can not only increase feelings of pressure and stress, it also limits your ability to complete your current task well. It may feel a little counter-intuitive but focussing on one thing at a time will increase your productivity and feelings of control – something vital to keeping stress at bay.
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3. Take a break...

Nobody should be exposed to prolonged and intense sources of pressure. Even if you are adept at dealing with pressure, it will eventually lead to stress and potentially a feeling of burnout if you don’t take adequate breaks. Good performance is often characterised by short bursts of intense activity followed by some respite, so even if the temptation is to stay at your desk and plough on with your job list, it’s vital you take time out.

4. ...and find a way to escape your ‘tech’

How often have you found yourself checking emails on the sofa, or even from your bed? A reported 90% of us sleep with our phones right next to us, or in the bed with us.

New technology has enabled us to work flexibly but the danger of being constantly connected to the office is that you are unable to switch off, meaning your stress levels will continue to build, even at home. Setting rules on when you can check emails on your smartphone may seem too prescriptive but it will help you to manage your pressure levels and relax more easily.

“IT seems as if the workplace is everywhere. We all lead a kind of tortoiseshell existence, where the office is at our back, whether it’s on an airplane, on a train...What most of us actually need is some kind of reflection time, some peace, to be with our families”
Professor Cary Cooper
founder, Robertson Cooper
5. Don’t let failing affect your confidence

One of the key elements of dealing with pressure and staying resilient is your level of personal confidence. When it feels as if things are getting on top of you or you haven’t hit the mark with a piece of work, it’s important to keep things in perspective. Everybody experiences periods of pressure and the odd failure but it shouldn’t affect your view of your own personality and capabilities – this confidence is what will enable you to react to pressure positively in the long term.

6. Take responsibility as a group

These tips are aimed at individuals but responsibility for a less stressed workplace lies with all those who work in it – including managers and teams. Being able to notice the signs of stress in others means that more support can be offered when people are struggling with pressure.

Looking more broadly, social support is a key element that contributes to high psychological well-being – this can mean being there to help with the workload of a teammate or simply allowing colleagues to share their issues and ensure they don’t feel isolated. Stress can show in different ways – some people bottle it up quietly and others show it more visibly – but what’s important is having an open atmosphere that addresses the issue of stress.

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