



Coaching Through the Chaos of Stress

Special points of interest:

- You must know your employee, but know yourself first.
- Before you spend one more day out of focus, stop and look carefully at your life.
- Is your state next?

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Unrelenting stress, the kind that many people face daily at work or at home, is debilitating. Sociologists and others often call it America's number one health problem.

- It's such a major factor that we have an agency devoted to the subject – the American Institute of Stress.
- The AIS estimates that stress on the job costs industry and business more than \$300 billion a year because of accidents, absenteeism, employee turnover, diminished productivity, medical/legal/insurance costs, and workers' compensation awards.
- In a University of North Carolina study, 50 percent of employees reported that they achieved less while fuming about a negative atmosphere or situation they faced.
- 20 percent said they no longer did their best work while under nonstop stress.
- A stunning 46 percent thought about quitting their jobs because of stress, and 12 percent resigned.

It is easy to see the dollars adding up and know that the \$300 billion plus price tag is not hype. For managers, the dilemma is how to coach through the chaos and get the work done without driving away the best workers.

How to do this? First, managers need specific information that tells them

what's going on with each employee – preferably before the stress gets so bad that half the workforce is thinking about quitting. A manager will have a much more difficult time coaching stressed workers or teams when the symptoms of tardiness, absenteeism, conflict and poor productivity are already apparent. A preventive is in order, one that tells us where the worker needs help and how best to offer that help before he gets to the point of throwing his hands in the air and stomping out.

Here are some ideas to move you on your way:



- First, make sure your leadership or lack thereof is not creating the problem. You must know your employee, but know yourself first. Are you communicating clearly? Are the job requirements understandable? Have you kept your employees abreast of changes they need to know about?

- Assessments will show you whether the employee has the skills, motivation, interest and other competencies to do the job he or she is in. If they are lacking, a development plan is in order, or a new position in which the employee fits better.

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Stress

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- Understand your employees' career goals and help them understand their roles in the organization and how they fit in the big picture.
- If the stress is not coming from the employee's work situation, direct him to therapy or counseling. Managers should not take on the role of counselor unless the stress is job-related and within the manager's area of expertise.
- Encourage your employees to strive for balance in their lives, especially the workers who seem overly focused on work. The person who regularly arrives at work first and leaves last is a prime candidate for a conversation about stress.



- Direct workers to take short breaks throughout the day. If your office culture permits it, remind employees in a humorous way over the public address system.

Stress can make people behave strangely, as a story about German composer Johannes Brahms illustrates. In 1890, when he was 57, Brahms said he would retire and enjoy his remaining years. After some

time had passed, he returned to composing.

I thought you weren't going to write any more," said a friend. Brahms replied that he had not intended to. "But after a few days, I was so delighted by the thought of not writing that the music came to me without effort!" Because of that respite, the world enjoys a number of Brahms' masterpieces that came between 1890 and his death in 1897.

Most employees cannot decide that easily to quit the cause of their stress, nor is that what we want to encourage. But a good leader/coach can help employees see how to take a break from the stress and perhaps develop a fresh perspective, one that allows them to rediscover delight in their work.

In this and future issues of Profiles Advantage we are focusing on the five perspectives of the coach. With this message we have examined two – whether the employee fits the job, and what motivates the employee in the job, through the prism of his/her reaction to stressful situations. Upcoming themes will look at:

- Compatibility between the employee and the manager
- Compatibility between the employee and his/her work teams
- The employee's effectiveness as a leader

We hope you are finding our ideas beneficial and are enjoying this exploration of the leader/manager as coach.

I don't care how much power, brilliance or energy you have, if you don't harness it and focus it on a specific target, and hold it there you're never going to accomplish as much as your ability warrants.

-- Zig Ziglar,
motivational guru