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All Stressed-Up and No Place to Go

by Patti Hathaway, CSP

The National Study of the Changing Workforce found that 88 percent of the employees surveyed reported having to work hard and 68 percent having to work fast, yet 60 percent still don't have enough time to get it all done. So, that means more than half the people feel they don't have enough time to get their jobs done. A very high percentage – 71 percent – said they feel used up at the end of the day and 57 percent reported being burned out or stressed by work.



“I am negatively stressed because of the changes. I’m exhausted from trying to conform to work environment changes. I feel less productive and less motivated. As a result, I’m more prone to using my sick leave time.”

Director of EEO

Many times the change itself is not a “bad” change, but the increased work load often increases our stress level. Sometimes we are pleased to have the scope of our jobs expanded because it adds interest to the job and increased job satisfaction. However, the additional pressure that comes with increased job scope unfortunately can create an environment in which it is impossible to respond promptly to our customers. Therefore, our job ends up being less rewarding to us. Our pride is affected in terms of what we are able to accomplish. The result can be burnout, which makes it increasingly difficult for us to maintain a high level of job performance.



Forty Winks

We need seven nights of good restful sleep. Some people need more sleep than others, but most sleep experts believe that adults need eight hours of sleep per night. Ongoing research is showing that when people don't get enough sleep, they build up “sleep debt.” The debt accumulates night after night. If you get one hour of sleep less per night, after eight nights you have built up a sleep debt equivalent to one night's sleep. Sleep debt takes a toll on our motor and intellectual functions. William Dement, author of *The Promise of Sleep* says “In

the simplest of terms, a large sleep debt makes you stupid.” It takes a toll on us in terms of work errors and can make us emotionally distant from our co-workers, friends, and family.

The University of Chicago studied young men who slept only four hours per night for six nights and found that sleep deprivation adversely affected their metabolism and hormone functions. The effects resembled those normally found in the aging process. Researchers believe that the effects of sleep deprivation might possibly increase the severity of chronic disorders as people age.

Another interesting point about sleep is that our body needs a regular sleep-wake routine. For those of us with daytime working hours, most of us go to bed at a certain time and we get up at a certain time. On the weekends, however, we tend to go to bed later and sleep in. Here’s the problem – if we sleep more than one hour beyond our normal waking time, we will be tired. It then takes our body forty-eight hours to recover from sleeping late. Let’s say you normally wake up at 6:30 a.m.. However, on Saturday, you get up after 7:45 a.m. Because you slept in that extra hour plus, it will take your body literally two days or 48 hours to recover. You will feel tired. We often refer to Mondays as “Blue Monday.” Perhaps that is in part due to the fact that we are still recovering from “sleeping in.”

Sleep experts suggest you should get up within an hour of your normal waking period even if you go to bed later than usual. To make up for those later nights, consider taking a twenty-minute nap in the afternoon. To make up your sleep debt, it is best to go to bed earlier than to sleep later. Aside from the physical benefits from your sleep routine, imagine how much you can enjoy the quiet time in your house with no one awake. Forty winks can make a big difference.

Waking Up

Think about how you wake up in the morning. Many of us wake up to an alarm clock. By virtue of the name, what does “alarm” say to us? Danger! We rise in the morning to a danger signal. We get out of bed, running around like a mad person. We yank the kids out of bed, shove a pastry at them. Oops! We forgot their lunch so we throw them some money. While they are running out the house, we yell “Have a good day!” We rush to work. When we arrive and we think, “Okay, I made it!” But in what condition? Some of us are stressed out before we even get to work.

Experts believe that the first 15 minutes of your waking time set the tone for the rest of the day. During the first fifteen minutes you are awake, your subconscious mind is at work because you not totally conscious at this point. Some of us are completely stressed out in the first fifteen minutes we are awake.

What are you listening to or watching when you get up? Do you watch the news? Why do we listen to the news? It’s rarely positive and won’t help you focus on the good things in life. Why do we listen to the traffic report when we’re already stuck in traffic? It’s too late. If we’re going to get into a major traffic snarl, it’s not like we’re going to get to work on time by listening to the news at that point. Why not listen to beautiful and uplifting music or your favorite speaker or comedian?

Next issue will discuss some additional stress management tips. For more details on managing your stress, read Patti’s book, *Untying the ‘Nots’ of Change Before You’re Fit to be Tied.*



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