

Dealing with Job Stress

By Jason Hosch, Ph.D.



Did you ever see the movie, “Office Space”? I must admit that I love this movie. It’s a comedy and a farce about the everyday stresses of working in corporate America, and ranks among the funniest movies I have ever seen. And while there is a lot of truth depicted in this movie, the fact remains that we can and often do experience a lot of stress in our jobs.

By definition, stress is “the body’s reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment or response”. While some stress is a normal part of life, excessive stress is problematic. The constant rush of adrenaline over-stimulates your heart, and over time, it will affect your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Consequently, it will interfere with your productivity, and affect your job performance, among many other things.

Some of the warning signs of stress include job dissatisfaction, negativism, loss of confidence, low morale, withdrawal, boredom, anxiety, frustration, fatigue, depression, alienation, anger / irritability, problems sleeping, problems concentrating, physical problems (like muscle tension, headaches, stomach problems, teeth grinding), disturbed relationships with family and friends, social withdrawal, loss of sex drive, apathy / loss of interest in work / absenteeism, and using alcohol or drugs to cope.

Stress in the workplace can be caused by individual differences such as personality conflicts with bosses or coworkers, or by limited coping skills. Here the focus needs to be put on developing prevention strategies to cope. Certain working conditions are also inherently stress-inducing. These may include job loss, impending layoffs, excessive workload demands, pressure to constantly work at optimum levels, lack of control or clear direction, poor or dangerous physical working conditions, inflexible work hours, conflicting job expectations, and being in the wrong career. The focus in this regard needs to be put on eliminating or reducing those work

environments as the way to reduce job stress.

Here are some tips for dealing with job stress:

- *Modify your job situation.* If you like your employer, but the job has become too stressful (or boring), ask about tailoring your job to your skills.
- *Take responsibility.* Be organized, accountable, be able to delegate responsibility.
- *Time management.* Plan ahead, set priorities, create a balanced schedule, don’t over-commit yourself, leave work on time as often as possible, and avoid taking work home.
- *Get time away.* Take regular breaks, structure quiet time during your day for relaxation or meditation, take a vacation.
- *Cultivate allies at work.* Having one or more co-workers who are willing to assist you in times of stress will reduce your stress level. Just remember to reciprocate and help them when they are in need.
- *Find humor in the situation.* When things get too serious, find a way to break through with laughter. Share a joke or funny story.
- *Have realistic expectations.* We can only fit so much work into one day. Unrealistic expectations set you up for failure. Don’t demand perfection from yourself or others.
- *Talk it out.* Sometimes the best stress-reducer is simply sharing your stress with someone close to you. Have a support system of trusted people. If you have a problem with boss or co-workers, try to work it out with them, or try to figure out a way to “get along better”.
- *Set boundaries.* Learn to say “no” to things that are just not that important. Know your own limits.
- *Put it in perspective.* Jobs are disposable. Your friends, family, and your health are not. If your employer expects too much of you, and it’s starting to take its toll on you, start looking for a new job/employer.
- *Surrender what is outside of your control.* The only things that we truly have control of are our own actions, our attitude, and our acceptance (of ourselves and of others). Otherwise, God is in control. Our reactions reveal our character and our trust in God.
- *Maintain a positive attitude* (and avoid those without one). Guard your heart and mind against negativity and pessimism, identify knee-jerk habits

and negative attitudes, think truthfully, avoid making “mountains out of molehills”.

- *Cultivate a thankful heart.* Focus on the things in life that you are grateful for. Also, try to be joyous even when you encounter problems or setbacks, because these will produce something good in us. This is not a natural response, but it is one that the God’s Spirit can provide. It is an attitude that looks expectantly to the lessons God will teach and the guidance and wisdom He will provide.
- *Stay healthy.* Exercise, maintain a proper diet, and get enough sleep.
- *Moderate your use of alcohol and avoid nicotine.*
- *All you can do is be prepared if you are worried about job layoffs.*
- *Get professional help if stress is having a profound effect in your life.*

As a last thought, I “stress” that you stay aware of your stress levels. Some of us have grown accustomed to an undercurrent of high stress in our lives, such that we may not even be aware that we are stressed, or of the effects that it is having in our lives. This reminds me of the morbid metaphor of boiling a frog. Not that I have ever done this, mind you, but I hear that if you put a frog in a pot of cold water and slowly turn up the heat, the water will eventually boil the frog, and it will die. This is much the same with intense job stress. Your health is everything, and no job, customer, or boss is worth putting yourself at risk. Find a way out through one or more of the strategies listed in this article. Take control of your situation and deal with your stress proactively. In turn, you will find yourself getting healthier physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, as well as having better relationships with the people around you. ■



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