

Stress Management for Managers

For some managers, a little stress can be a good thing. When the pressure is on, they tend to do their best work. However, when demands are unrelenting with no clear end in sight, even those who thrive on stress can be at risk for burnout.

Today's leaders are busy not only with their usual responsibilities – supervising employees and daily accounting work – but they are also often involved in critical strategic initiatives to help their organizations pull through the down economy. This can mean more meetings, more projects and more stress. If these circumstances sound familiar, consider the following strategies for dealing with your tension:

Seek a fresh perspective

A chief source of stress for managers is often the feeling that they must get through challenging periods on their own. They may worry that by asking for help will make them seem incompetent. Yet, even CEOs and government leaders turn to advisors regularly. They build large networks of trusted individuals who can offer their opinions on critical strategies and situations.

Talking to mentors and other leaders within and outside your company can give you alternate viewpoints, allowing you to refocus and address problems with renewed confidence. If you've spent time nurturing your circle of contacts, providing support to others when needed, you'll find that most people won't hesitate to help in return.

Have faith in the delegation process

When business conditions are tough and you're operating with a limited staff, you may feel less inclined to hand off tasks to others. After all, there is little time to correct mistakes and you may be concerned about overburdening those on your team.

By continuing to delegate selective assignments, however, you can not only reduce your stress level but also create learning experiences for your staff members. Rather than turning to your most experienced employees all of the time for assistance, consider spreading out the work by offering some assignments to more junior staff. They are likely to welcome the chance to show off their skills. Remember, if you have hired effectively, you should be able to trust those on your team to support you.

See the silver lining

There's no question that difficult economic times have placed additional pressure on managers. Even when things seem to be at their worst, however, recognize there may be positives to gain from currently challenging situations. If, for instance, your department was downsized, you may now have an opportunity to become more visible as a manager. Successfully leading and motivating remaining staff at this time can showcase your abilities to senior management and reinforce your value to the company.

Find some balance

When business demands and stress levels are high, often one of the first things to be eliminated are work breaks. Managers may feel that they'll get more done by working through lunch, when the opposite is usually true. By failing to recharge, creativity and productivity can decline as the day progresses, leading to reduced performance and mistakes. Other managers may worry that taking breaks makes them appear to have time to spare and that they are not taking the stepped-up workload seriously. Actually, finding time for even 15 minutes of non-work activity during the day can not only make a big difference in your stress level but also set a positive example for your team.

Finally, as you focus on your own work stress, also make sure you're providing the same assistance to your staff. Watch for signs they may be burning out and help them find ways to reduce the pressure. Be willing to reallocate workloads and bring in temporary financial professionals to help your core team fulfill obligations.

Additionally, make sure you're doing your part to create a supportive and rewarding work environment. Simple activities such as celebrating employee birthdays or the completion of key projects are inexpensive ways to help to build camaraderie and boost morale. Your efforts to reduce stress for everyone can contribute to changes in your own outlook.

For more advice on management and career issues, listen to The Management Minute, Robert Half's podcast series <http://www.rhi.com/podcast>.

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