Tips for Stress Management

Stressors are unfortunately a part of our daily personal and working lives. Stressors, however, may not be directly problematic. Rather, it can be our responses to those stressors that can be challenging. Working to reduce our overall stress levels can make it much easier to do our job. It is especially helpful for managers – who have the main responsibility for dealing with distressed workers – to regulate their stress levels. Stressed managers can be considerably less effective when reacting to stressed workers.

A number of things can help you reduce your stress level to a manageable level.

1. Avoid unnecessary stress. There are stressors that we must deal with (e.g., urgent work deadlines), and there are stressors that we can choose to eliminate from our lives (e.g., the stress of being late for a meeting because you responded to a non-urgent email).
   - Learn to say “no”.
   - Prioritize urgent vs. non-urgent tasks and responsibilities.
   - Make your to-do list manageable (address the “must do” items and put the “should” items on the backburner).
   - Recognize your limits and accept that you can’t do it all!

2. Identify the causes of your stress. Often the stressors we deal with are predictable and come up again and again. Identify ways you can problem-solve the predictable stressors within your control.
   - Make a list of your most common personal and work-related stressors.
   - Identify the cause of the stress: what specifically makes the stressor feel stressful?
   - Ask yourself what is within your control and which stressors you can take action on. Use a solution-focused strategy.

3. Apply an appropriate stress management strategy. Proactively work to reduce your stress levels. Realize that strategies effective for small stressors may not be effective for larger ones. Have a range of strategies at your disposal.
   - Proactively maintaining good sleep habits can help prevent stress from becoming unmanageable.
   - Deep breathing or distraction techniques can be good “in-the-moment” stress-reduction techniques.
   - Relaxation techniques (meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga) can help.
   - Social activities – particularly those that include the people you like the most – can be a strong buffer against stress.
4. **Problem-solve the stressor.** Work actively to control or mitigate parts of the stressor over which you have control. Teach yourself to quickly recognize components of stressors over which you do and do not have control.
   - Don’t avoid tackling the stressor (whether it’s a situation, assignment, or worker-related issue): avoidance almost always makes the situation worse.
   - Be willing to compromise on effective solutions; an acute stressor may require an immediate (but perhaps less than ideal) solution.

5. **Change your thinking.** Actively change your thoughts about your stressors; the way you interpret what you are experiencing impacts your emotional reaction.
   - Be mindful of your internal language (e.g., viewing a traffic jam as a “nuisance” rather than an “utter catastrophe” leads to different interpretations).
   - Try to be less of a perfectionist, and allow yourself to more easily accept and tolerate things that differ from your ideal.
   - Focus on the positive; think about the “silver lining” that comes along with some (not all) stressors (e.g., receiving a special assignment may mean a tighter schedule, but also possibly a step toward promotion).

6. **Make time to relax and recharge.** Make it a priority to set aside some time for you. You can’t run on empty.
   - **Make sure you have at least a short period of** rest and relaxation as part of your daily schedule.
   - **Connect with others; spending time with** positive people enhances our overall quality of life.
   - **Do something you enjoy every day.**

7. **Strengthen your physical health.** The better rested and healthier you feel, the more resilient you can be in dealing with stress.
   - Make getting enough sleep a priority.
   - Exercise regularly.
   - Eat healthy foods, and eat regularly.
   - Reduce the amount of caffeine and sugar you consume.
   - Avoid alcohol, cigarettes and non-prescription drugs.