

Managing Stress

Stress can be caused by two things – the organisation we work in and ourselves. Any discussion about stress therefore needs to be put in a context. Too many stress management processes look only at the individual, which ignores the context.

Organisations can cause stress by putting pressure on the workforce to undertake more and more. Today, when jobs are not for life, it is all too easy to believe that we have to work late and get in early just to keep pace with the job. To go along with such cultures courts disaster at the political, social and individual levels. At the political level the recognition that the job really needs two people, at the social level we lose any balance in our lives which can affect relationships, and at the individual level we become burnt out. This can be rectified by realistic appraisal of posts, positions, work levels and structures and systems.

Even where the organisation is protective of its workforce and the culture of healthy individuals can still become stressed. The reasons for this are of course many and varied. Here I will cover just one aspect – our styles and beliefs. There are five different styles that stem from our beliefs. For example,

I have to be perfect then I will be okay

People with **Be Perfect** as a style go all out for perfection. We are great at producing accurate, reliable work. Each piece of work can take us a long time as keep correcting and going over and over things. Our desk or the office have to

be neat and tidy without a thing out of place and perhaps with everything colour co-ordinated. We can make our own stress by not meeting our own expectations and by making a mistake. When this happens we beat up on ourselves and feel really bad. Of course we may believe that others have to be perfect too and that can cause stress when they don't come up to scratch either.

I have to do things quickly and then I will be okay

If we have this style, called **Hurry Up**, we get work done quickly in a short time. When there is a lot to do we become energised. We draw up an action plan with many items, all to be completed in a very short time. We then accomplish the changes only superficially, so that we fail to reap the full benefit of the changes which can cause us, and others, stress. Or we select our priorities so quickly that we overlook significant areas that we should be working on and then become stressed when we realise that we have missed something – or someone else realises that we have missed something.

I have to please people and then I will be okay

If we have the **Please** this trait we can make good team members. We aim to please others without asking. However, we have difficulty making decisions and tend to feel safer being told what we should be doing. Being a manager with this style can be very difficult as they want to please everyone. We want someone else to determine our priorities in case we get it wrong, and this can cause us stress. Or we worry about upsetting other people if we make changes to our own behaviour and this too is stressful.



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I must try hard to do lots of things well and then I will be okay

If we have the working style **Try Hard** we tackle work enthusiastically. Our energy peaks with something new to do so we are great project leaders and initiators but others need to come in to finish the project as we get bored. We pay attention to a whole range of aspects which others may overlook when undertaking a task.. We can easily side-track ourselves by starting to experiment with alternative layouts for any plan - and maybe even start to develop alternative designs.

We can cause our stress by taking on too many different tasks, being interested in too many things and not having sufficient time to devote to them.

I will be okay as long as I am strong

This working style of **Be Strong** means we keep a stiff upper lip. We stay calm and emotionless and are good in a crisis. We become energised when we have to cope. We keep on thinking when others may be panicking. We are loath to admit to having any weaknesses quiet but will do our best to avoid facing up to any shortcomings. We cannot imagine why we would want to change when we are in control of everything already.

We create our stress by telling ourselves that we must be strong and not feel, and not show what we experience as weakness. If we do show any signs of vulnerability we consider that we have failed which is stressful for us. Because of our aloofness with others we tend not to have too many close friends and this can be stressful as there is no

one to talk to. We also have difficulty in relaxing as we can experience “play” as rather pathetic.

Whilst I have only just touched on these styles we can see that they will affect what we believe about ourselves, others and life. Amongst other things, we need to give ourselves permissions to make mistakes, take our time, please ourselves, complete tasks, feel and show vulnerability. When we do these things we will release energy to enjoy life.

When we act as if our beliefs are facts then we cause ourselves difficulties. First we have to realise that we are living by certain beliefs that we have mistaken as facts, and then we can update these beliefs and give ourselves permissions that release us.

Remember – birds can fly because they carry no baggage!

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