

Workplace Stress: A Survival Guide

Are offices pressures getting the best of you?

You just finished your 8 a.m. Monday forecast call with your manager and are feeling additional pressure to make up the revenue shortfall for the month. You'd like to have a few minutes to regroup before your next meeting, but the phone starts ringing, 50 new e-mails are up on your screen, and your cell phone is buzzing. And now your manager wants the updated prospect "up-side" list on his desk by tomorrow morning. Your afternoon is already full with meetings—and you have to leave the office by 5 p.m. to be at your daughter's soccer game.

Just thinking about this scenario makes me stressed. Have you recently felt that wave of anxiety wash over you? Some people feel they work best under pressure,

but most do not. The swell of panic that arises can be overwhelming. People are asked to do more with less as there is the continual need to improve profits and reduce costs. Stress is a natural reaction to that environment, but as a manager, you are expected to remain cool under pressure and be the role model for others.

That's easier said than done. Stressful situations will never go away in the workplace; it's just a natural part of today's environment. However, I'd like to offer a few techniques you can try the next time you have that panicked feeling:

>> TAKE TIME TO REGROUP Get away from the office and go somewhere where you can think clearly. If possible, work from a different location such as home or a coffee shop where you won't be interrupted. If that's not possible, even a 10-minute walk around the block can be beneficial.

>> WRITE A LIST AND PRIORITIZE Identify each action with an "1," "2" or "3," with "1" being the most important. Allocate how much time you believe each task will take and then schedule out the rest of your day or week to include the "2" list. Taking five to ten minutes at the end of each day to review this list will give you a head start for the next morning. At some point in time, seriously look at the "3" items and determine if they need to be done at all.

>> PUSH BACK If you don't have the time to do something well, let your boss or client know. The due date might be negotiable. If you feel that what you've been asked to do isn't critical, ask for an explanation to get a clear understanding of the purpose of the task. What is the real objective?

>> ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS Once you have a game plan, don't get sidetracked. Clear your desk, let your phone go straight to voicemail, close your door and tell anyone who stops by that you can't stop to talk right now. Write "focus" on a piece of paper and tape it in a visible spot. Completely silence your electronic devices—even turn off the vibrate mode. Technology is wonderful, but it can add to the stress and be a distraction.

>> CONSIDER A LIFESTYLE CHANGE If you are feeling stressed during most of your waking hours, you need to make some changes in your life. That constant feeling of anxiety was once thought to be a stimulus to creative thinking, but that theory has been disproved. If you're feeling overwhelmed all the time, then there's a great chance that the people around you feel your anxiety. It's simply not good for your health and well-being.

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Do you have suggestions on what has worked to minimize stress in your life? Post your ideas on www.smmsondoff.com

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