Mental Stress Quiz

QUESTION

Is it true that some stress is positive?

ANSWER

Dr. Hans Selyee noted that stress can be positive and productive. it is also referred to a "challenge" or "positive" stress. Positive Stress turns negative when stress occurs in amounts that one cannot handle and both mental and physical changes may occur.

PREAMBLE

GENERAL

Canadian employees report workplace stress as primary cause of mental health concerns.

Mental health issues in the workplace are among the top concerns for organizations of all sizes. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), one in five Canadians experience a mental health problem or illness each year, equating to 500,000 employees unable to work every week due to mental health problems or illnesses.

Understanding mental health, mental illness and their impacts in the workplace, Canadian employees report workplace stress as the primary cause of their mental health problems or illness, with depression and anxiety noted as the top two issues.

Mental Health Perspective

Mental health concerns can impact anyone at any time. In their workplace lifecycle, employees move back and forth along a mental health spectrum, including **"healthy in work"** and **"in work struggling."**

Workplace stress has become cyclical — it is a major contributor to mental health issues, which can subsequently impact workplace productivity. In today's organizations, Canadians reported high levels of concern regarding the impact of

their mental health issues on their career and job performance. Close to three-quarters (70 per cent) of respondents stated that their work experience impacted their mental health, while a higher number (78 per cent) reported mental health as the primary reason for missing work.

Coping

Despite the prevalence of mental health issues, employees are confident in their ability to cope with stressful situations. The majority reported a neutral (59 per cent) or positive (26 per cent) outlook on mental health, which closely mirrors the reported coping strategies. More than half (54 per cent) of respondents indicated they have high/optimal coping skills. Employees identify the use of positive coping mechanisms such as seeking professional support, and negative coping strategies such as drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco.

Without effective coping strategies, employees are at risk of further harm to themselves. Suicide remains a top concern, with more than half (58 per cent) report they had considered taking their lives to cope with mental illness.

WHY IS IT RIGHT

Workplace stress then is the harmful physical and emotional responses that can happen when there is a conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands. In general, the combination of high demands in a job and a low amount of control over the situation can lead to stress. (See Canadian Mental Health Association)

Stress in the workplace can have many origins or come from one single event. It can impact on both employees and employers alike. It is generally believed that some stress is okay (sometimes referred to as "challenge" or "positive stress") but when stress occurs in amounts that you cannot handle, both mental and physical changes may occur.

Stress is the body's response to real or perceived threats. Today most of our problems cannot be solved with a fight or flight response. We have to work through our problems and find constructive solutions.

Stress is about reactions people have to the situations they face. These reactions are not the same from person to person. Some stress is expected and can be a positive force in our lives. In fact, it is often what provides us with the energy and motivation to meet our daily challenges both at home and at the workplace. This type of stress response is what helps you "rise" to a challenge and meet your goals such as deadlines, sales or production targets, or finding new clients. Some people would not consider this challenge a type of stress because, having met the challenge, we are satisfied and happy.

Feelings of negative stress usually increase when people believe the demands of a situation are greater than their ability to deal with it. Stress may prevent them from being productive. In some cases, people avoid dealing with a problem entirely, which may make the situation worse and increase stress to them and others around them.

Workplace stress

Workplace stress can occur when there is a mismatch between the requirements of

the role, your capabilities and resources and supports available.

Everyone knows what stress feels like and we've probably all experienced it at some stage — at home, school or work, or while getting outside our comfort zone, but while this stress is normal, if it is ongoing, it can become a problem.

KEY COMPONENTS OF STRESS

Stress can negatively affect our health and safety

Stress can have an impact on your overall health. Our bodies are designed, pre-programmed if you wish, with a set of automatic responses to deal with stress. The problem is that our bodies deal with all types of stress in the same way. Experiencing stress for long periods of time (such as lower level but constant stressors at work) will activate this system, but it doesn't get the chance to "turn off".

Common effects of stress on the body include:

- headache
- muscle tension or pain
- chest pains
- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- weakened immune system
- fatigue / insomnia
- stomach and digestive issues
- high blood sugar
- increased cholesterol and fatty acids in blood for energy production systems

Stress can affect your mood or thinking by:

- increasing forgetfulness, anxiety, restlessness, irritability, defensiveness, mood swings, hypersensitivity, anger, etc.
- decreasing ability to think clearly or focus

Stress can contribute to incidents because people often:

- sleep poorly
- self- or over-medicate themselves
- feel depressed
- feel anxious, jittery and nervous
- become angry and reckless (often due to a sense of unfairness or injustice)

When people engage in these behaviours or are in these emotional states, they are more likely to:

- become momentarily (but dangerously) distracted
- feel withdrawn or isolated from others
- have outbursts, etc.
- neglect responsibilities
- make errors in judgment
- put their bodies under physical stress, increasing the potential for strains and sprains
- react poorly in normal activities that require hand-eye or foot-eye

coordination

Untreated long term (chronic) stress has been reported to be associated with health conditions such as:

- anxiety
- insomnia
- muscle pain
- high blood pressure
- weakened immune system
- heart disease
- depression
- obesity

WHY IS EVERYTHING ELSE WRONG

How to Prevent Job-Related Stress

When stress on the job is interfering with your ability to perform, take care of yourself, or manage your personal life, it's time to take steps to change things. Start by looking closely at your physical and emotional health. When your physical and emotional health are prioritized and your need are addressed, you're stronger and more resilient to stress. The healthier you feel, the more equipped you will be to manage work stress.

While some stress is normal in life, excessive stress interferes with your physical and emotional health, so it's important to find ways to keep it under control. This change does not necessarily mean a total lifestyle switch. Even small things can improve your mood, add energy, and make you feel like you're healthier and happier. Take one change at a time, and as you make more positive lifestyle choices, you'll soon notice a greatly reduced stress level, both at home at work.

Suggestions that you can try to create a less stressful environment at work prevention:

- Avoid too much caffeine, soda pop, and junk. Better yet, stop using them.
- Don't procrastinate. You'll be happy you got it done.
- Encourage positive self-talk.
- Don't get caught up in gossip or negative thinking.
- Use the stairs for exercise.
- Avoid nicotine. Smoking when you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed may seem calming, but nicotine is a powerful stimulant — leading to higher, not lower, levels of anxiety.
- Do one thing at a time.
- Eat nourishing food that keeps you going and makes you feel good. Drink water.
- Change your attitudes. Think of stressful situations as a challenge to your creative thinking.
- Share work problems. If you encounter an unusually challenging work problem, talk with coworkers. It will help to talk through issues. Sometimes just by talking through a problem, you will find the answer.
- Know your limits: Be realistic about what you can accomplish and do not put unrealistic workloads and timelines on yourself.
- Say no when you can't.

- Wear comfortable clothes.
- Find humour. Don't take everything too seriously; find a way to break through with laughter. Share a joke or funny story.
- Make "TO DO" lists. List everything you need to do in order of priority.
- Schedule time for yourself. Stick to the schedule!
- Take a relaxation break. Eat lunch away from your desk or work area. Try to go home on time.
- Leave earlier from home in the morning. Running late and hurrying adds stress.
- Take real weekends and vacations. Avoid thinking about work.
- Turn off your blackberries and emails after a certain time. The email will wait till tomorrow.
- Leave your cell phones and emails out of the restaurants. Enjoy your meals without stress.
- Organize your files and work space so that things can be found quickly.
- Delegate tasks.
- Don't over-commit yourself. Avoid scheduling things back-to-back or trying to fit too much into one day.
- Stay positive.

Most jobs involve some degree of stress, and this can affect people at all levels within an organisation, including frontline employees, managers and senior leaders.

Some stress is reasonable, but it becomes an issue when it is excessive and ongoing. There are some strategies everyone can adopt to manage and reduce their own stress levels, as well as find a positive work-life balance.

THE DO'S AND DON'T´S THAT EMPLOYERS CAN ADDRESS STRESS IN WORKPLACE

DO'S

- Treat all employees in a fair and respectful manner.
- Take stress seriously and be understanding to staff under too much pressure.
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms that a person may be having trouble coping with stress.
- Involve employees in decision-making and allow for their input directly or through committees, etc.
- Encourage managers to have an understanding attitude.
- Be proactive by looking for signs of stress among their staff.
- Provide workplace health and wellness programs that target the true source of the stress. The source of stress at work can be from any number of causes – safety, ergonomics, job demands, etc. Survey the employees and ask them to help identify the root cause(s).
- Incorporate stress prevention or positive mental health promotion in policies or your corporate mission statement.
- Make sure staff has the training, skills and resources they need to be successful in their positions.
- Design jobs to allow for a balanced workload. Allow employees to have control over the tasks they do as much as possible.
- Value and recognize individuals' results and skills.
- Provide support.
- Be clear about job expectations.

- Make sure job demands are reasonable by providing manageable deadlines, hours of work, and clear duties as well as work that is interesting and varied.
- Provide access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) for those who wish to attend.

DO NOT

- Do not tolerate bullying or harassment in any form.
- Do not ignore signs that employees are under pressure or feeling stressed.
- Do not forget that elements of the workplace itself can be a cause of stress. Stress management training and counselling services can be helpful to individuals, but do not forget to look for the root cause of the stress and to address these causes as quickly as possible.