

What HR Should Do When The Office is Full of Overstressed Workers



How to eliminate chronic stress from your organization.

Widespread stress can be a killer for your company. If it's a chronic problem, stress can cause your staff to experience a multitude of health problems, which can lead to sick days and decreased productivity all around.

Further, the stress can permeate your culture and lead to conflict, irritability and fear. This will create problems with the employees you have now and make it harder to find great employees in the future. Word gets around when companies are fantastic and when they're terrible. And a chronically stressed organization is terrible. Candidates will find out.

So what is HR to do? Try these tips to help your overstressed workers relax and get back to a healthy state of mind.

Take it to the team

Share your concerns about your overstressed staff with managers and maybe a few key employees. Ask if they are sensing the same vibe. They have a stake in improving the morale at the office and may be able to offer creative solutions.

"Ask what they have observed, and get their feedback on how to best deal with it. They are closer to the stress than you are, and by asking their opinion, you demonstrate trust, validate [or] test your assumptions, and get practical advice on what would help," says Stacy Lindenberg, owner of workplace performance consultancy Talent Seed Consulting. Brainstorm solutions and keep everyone up to date on what you plan to try. Get continuous feedback on which solutions work and which don't.

Communicate

Management should communicate openly and frequently with staff about any problems or situations that may currently causing stress – a big project, budget cuts, layoffs, etc. Acknowledge the stressors and explain the reasons, suggests small-business consultant Alyssa Johnson.

Also communicate your plan to manage those stressors. “People can manage stress for a period of time if they know there’s an end date or a good enough reason,” explains Johnson. “Without knowing either, they’ll start looking for greener grass.”

Consider a wellness solution

Employees who are exhausted or sick don’t do their best work. Workplace wellness plans can help. Even if you don’t have the budget or bandwidth for a formal plan, a few free ideas could offer some great benefits.

Advocate for people to get away from their desks during lunch, suggests Danyelle Little, founder of TheCubicleChick.com, a career and lifestyle blog. You can also encourage staff to be more active within the office by doing things such as taking the stairs and walking between offices instead of emailing. “This gets the heart rate up and increases endorphins which can help relieve stress and other stress related issues,” she explains.

Little also suggests not emailing employees outside of normal work hours unless it’s an emergency. Uninterrupted breaks away from the office will allow them to decompress.

Make employees feel appreciated

Make your employees feel valued by taking notice of their successes and praising or thanking them more often. Help them feel that you value their individual contributions to the company’s prosperity and continued growth and success, recommends Tatiana Sokolova, CEO of Major Aide, an online university selection tool. “This will make employees more confident in their performance which will result in less stress.”