

What really stresses you out at work?

If you are typical of the many people we meet each year then you'll probably find your particular bug-bear among the following:

- Handling office conflicts,
- Having difficult conversations with colleagues (or conversations with difficult colleagues)!
- Giving feedback on poor performance,
- Dealing with mountainous workloads,
- Managing teams that are not working together well.

These are the types of issues that cause major headaches in workplaces all over the world. While attention is being paid to issues like childcare, flexible working, home working and similar initiatives, much less support is being offered for these “everyday” difficulties. Yet not only do issues like these cause so many problems, those who battle with them often find themselves feeling too drained to take time out to look at new ways of handling them.

Having been made aware of this situation, we have spent time researching and developing useful tools and techniques that we feel will make a huge positive impact, including looking at how this can be achieved as quickly as possible. Our answer to the problem has been to develop a suite of rapid learning capsules each dedicated to a different aspect of the problem, but also capable of being put together to form a cohesive programme of change for organisations facing particular issues such as re-organisation, increases in workload, or high levels of workplace stress.

The learning capsules are termed Red Button sessions as they are a rapid response to an immediate need. They are built around the model of learn, practice, understand, take-away and use – with each one lasting between 90 and 120 minutes and containing the essential essence of each topic. The goal is for participants to leave with new behaviours and skills they can use that day.

You can find out more about the capsules by visiting www.clickredbutton.co.uk, or by contacting us via the email addresses Julie.Hurst@clickredbutton.co.uk, or Amanda.Edwards@clickredbutton.co.uk. You can also call on 01530 274124.

In the meantime here are some tips and techniques to help you, and to give you a taste of the kind of information the learning capsules contain.

Top Tips

The key to tackling the root causes of workplace stress is to stop these potential problems before they start or at least before they escalate. These tips will help you to think about how you can make some changes in 2008.

When dealing with heavy workloads try this simple three-step approach:

1. First of all take a step back and breathe – stress robs you of your ability to think clearly and rationally. A moment's pause for reflection could save a lot of time and trouble further down the line. You need a “make it work” not a “knee jerk” reaction.
2. Clear the clutter to clear your mind. Piles of paper, inboxes clogged by unread email, files scattered everywhere - all of these things cause stress. It's not about being neat – it's about feeling more in control.
3. Allocate a dedicated time slot to everything you need to do. Then you can work out what can be done, and what cannot. You can also focus more fully and enjoy a sense of achievement when you complete tasks in a more structured way.

In tackling conflicts at work:

1. Plan to have your conversation about the conflict at a mutually convenient time. It is best not to go into things in a hot-headed manner. This will only escalate matters.
2. Focus on objective facts and observable behaviour. Avoid emotionally charged argument, accusations and judgement. If you are resolving a conflict between third parties make sure you

remain unbiased and fair. If it is a conflict between you and someone else try writing down the main issues, and asking a neutral party to look them over before talking to the person concerned. Even if you feel provoked try to take the more mature stance - it will get you further in the long run.

3. Listening and asking good questions to get a really good understanding of where the other person is coming from can often help to resolve a difficult situation more quickly than simply stating your point of view, or worse getting defensive.

When looking to give feedback:

1. Be clear: help people understand what you would like them to do more of, and what you would like them to do less of, as they go about their work.
2. Make sure your feedback is balanced, try to catch people doing their jobs well; give on the spot, clear and specific feedback when you see your people doing a great job. Constant criticism does not motivate.
3. Take time out with your employees to reflect on what's working and what isn't, and use that as a basis for moving forward.

Obviously there is a great deal more to be said on each of these subjects, and if you are interested in learning many more practical ways of dealing with any of the situations we have mentioned, please get in touch, and we will do all we can to help.

Julie Hurst and Amanda Edwards

Julie.Hurst@clickredbutton.co.uk,

Amanda.Edwards@clickredbutton.co.uk. Tel: 01530 274124.