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Stop Inflicting Stress

8 Ways to Stop Inflicting Stress on Your Team



Absence through stress causes costs to your firm, from covering absent staff to compensating clients for errors. Lost client confidence is another issue. Try not to add to it by being the cause of stress. Here are eight tips, in no particular order:

1. Don't take it out on them.

If you are stressed, you should not pass it on by being impatient or short tempered. This is even more important if your stress has nothing to do with your team. They may have some tolerance and understanding if they think the stress is justified, but it will not be unlimited.

2. Don't consistently overload them

Research shows that people can cope with short periods of stress, but that extended periods can get them to the breaking point. And from that they do not fully recover. Giving someone additional work due to a crisis or because someone has left may even be something they are happy to help with, but asking them to do two people's work for two years may lead to a breakdown.

3. Give them the tools to do the job

This may include access to information, or training or administrative support. Or even a budget. If you ask your son to cut the lawn, give him a mower. Using scissors is a cruel and unusual punishment.

4. Don't undermine

For some people confidence is a fragile flower. Take care that you do not undermine it, particularly inadvertently. Some thrive on banter, others do not, so know your audience.

5. Train, coach, monitor

As noted, give them the tools for the job, but also be available for interaction on how it is going. This means that you can give feedback and develop staff skills. Delegate, don't abdicate. Feeling left on your own to sink or swim is stressful, especially if the activity is not something you have done before, or do not feel terribly confident in doing.

6. Understand differences in style and personality

Some people will carry out the same task in different ways. Provided they achieve the necessary results on time, and the various steps are clear, a mere difference in style should not make a difference in the way they are judged. Personality is more subtle, and you should try to be aware of personality differences between you and your team members, and also within the team. We have seen that for some banter is water off a ducks back, while for others it may be akin to bullying. Even the introvert/extravert difference can cause problems. The introvert will need to spend some time away from people to recharge, the extravert time with people for the same reason. The danger is that they view each other as insufferably loud, or miserably stand offish.

7. Hold difficult conversations

Managers often avoid difficult conversations – for the obvious reason that they are difficult. The danger is that a small issue becomes huge, and the cost of dealing with it becomes greater. The person concerned may justifiably ask “why did you not speak before?” And others in the team may be stressed by a behaviour that the manager refuses to address.

8. Communicate clear aims and expectations

If staff know what is expected of them, they can take action to deliver it. If this is not made clear, they will be in doubt whether they are doing the right thing. This uncertainty is made even more stressful by a leader who avoids difficult conversations.

One result of not inflicting stress on your team is that they will be more effective, thereby reducing your own level of stress. This gives rise to a virtuous circle.

WARNING: What you should avoid doing is taking all the stress of your team onto your own shoulders. That just means that you will be the one to break down. That will impact your team, firm and clients and will undo what you are trying to achieve. Resist the temptation to take on “somebody else's monkey” and develop your team so that they can deal with their own work issues with suitable supervision and support.

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