

Workplace Stress: It Costs Everyone

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Roseland, NJ – Companies, large and small, are being forced to come to terms with the growing levels of employee stress in the workplace. As the result of firms that have downsized and streamlined to remain competitive, employee workloads have conversely increased to meet the need. The result is an increase in stress levels to a point where human resources departments need to take stress relief measures to protect the company's current and future profitability. Stress can no longer being viewed as part of the cost of doing business; it needs to be seen as a factor that can prove very costly to a company's bottom line.

Job stress, as defined by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. The job stressors in the workplace have been shown to have a direct influence on worker safety, health, and productivity. NIOSH studies point to a direct correlation between job stress and increased absenteeism, tardiness, and intentions by workers to quit their jobs.

The physiological response to stress is to prepare the body for defensive action. This includes an increased pulse rate and muscle tension. This "fight or flight" response generally does not cause a problem when it is intermittent and short-lived. If heightened stress levels continue unresolved, wear and tear to key biological functions can suffer long-term and irreversible damage.

The cost to companies can be measured both monetarily and in terms of workforce retention. When unaddressed stress continues in a work setting, exhaustion, illness, injury, and job failure are often the result. There is growing pool of evidence that points to stress as a key contributor to several chronic health problems including cardiovascular disease and psychological disorders. This can represent a huge loss to families. The loss to companies in terms of productivity and health costs is skyrocketing as well.

- Workers who must take time off due to stress, anxiety, or a related disorder will be off the job for about 20 days. – U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Healthcare expenditures are nearly 50% greater for workers who report high levels of workplace stress. – Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
- American Industry spends more than \$26 billion annually on medical bills and disability payments. – Institute for Management Excellence

Successfully addressing the issue of job stress is one for human resource departments to tackle. Stress management training and organizational change are two areas where HR professionals can intervene with steps that will prove beneficial in the long-term for both the employer and the worker. Teaching stress reduction methods can offer fast-acting relief to employees suffering from sleep disturbances and anxiety disorders. Long-term recovery efforts come as the result of organizational change, including addressing excessive workload, conflicting expectations, and internal communication issues. Job stress cannot be relieved overnight, but companies that set stress reduction objectives and goals are making an investment in their future viability.

