

Exiting 'Job-Stress' Express

Stress is simply energy, so stress management is merely energy conservation. Good stress is the excitement you feel when your team wins. Distress is whenever you feel frustrated, threatened or angry. Work is a leading source of distress, which has been coined "job stress."

Eighty percent of people feel overly stressed by their jobs. More often than not, workers end their days with back or neck pain. Unmanaged deadline pressure is linked to heart problems. Job stress is estimated to cost American industry over \$300 billion annually.

In today's workplace, self-calming is nearly as important as self-starting. Calmness radiates confidence. New workers will go through seven to 10 career changes in a lifetime, so learn to go with the flow. Mastering soft skills, like self-calming, can boost your personal performance by 30 to 40 percent.

A high EQ (Emotional Quotient) is not just a buzzword but an added value. Your ability to deal with daily pressures is so important that it can be measured with an Emotional



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Intelligence test. Low EQ applicants may be "at risk" for future human relations problems and absenteeism.

The ABCs of Stress Management: I worked at the World Trade Center, which I renamed as the World-Stress-Center. The motto was "you are either the pavement or the steamroller." I decided to exit the stress-express to a void being steamrolled.

The following stress-reducing tips have proven to be helpful.

- **Physical well-being is the backbone of stress management:** Reduce your caffeine intake and don't starve yourself at work. Reduce noise level. Rest up when you can, and definitely take breaks and vacations. Surround yourself with pleasing colors, pictures, scents and good lighting whenever possible. Stress-free music soothes ravaged nerves. Engage in activities that involve both exercise and relaxation.

- **Get a good job fit through a career assessment:** A job "misfit" creates frustration, just like using your opposite hand to print your first name. You can do the job, but it's stress-

ful. That is, you can write your name with your non-dominant hand, but it is frustrating.

- **Attitude:** Believe in yourself. Know what you can and cannot control. Attitudes that employers value the most are conscientious, emotionally stable and agreeable, if in customer service. Convert bad stress into good stress by thinking differently. Instead of saying, "I feel so stressed out," say, "I am so excited about the chance to ..." Avoid "staff infections" by watching the company you keep. A whiner can infect you with negative attitudes; seek the support of positive people.

- **Breathing:** Take five slow, deep breaths. While exhaling, silently say "five" to yourself. Just inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Pause briefly, taking the next slow breath and then exhale, saying four silently. Proceed at your own pace, counting your exhalations down to one.

- **Choice:** You always have a choice as to how you respond to work challenges. Control your work by increasing your skills and using time management. Practice cubicle etiquette by keeping your noise level down and being a good neighbor. Don't be an e-mail junkie, checking your e-mail every chance possible. Work hard, but don't overstress. Remember, you want to stretch, not snap your mind.

These ABCs will give you directions to safely exit the Job-Stress Express and even take a scenic view of your life.

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