



## The Stress of Leadership

As the demands placed upon leaders increase, so does the level of stress. Researchers agree that a certain amount of stress is necessary to maintain vitality and a zest for life. However, too much stress can cause health problems, impair performance and curtail your creativity. It is important to step back and take stock of the stressors in your life and reevaluate how you might tackle them.



It is the intent of this article to broaden your awareness of commonly shared work place stressors and ways to better diagnose your particular needs. The Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina (**CCL**) did several interesting surveys recently. \* They sought out to find if particular issues or people were causing the most stress for leaders at work. Here is what they found:

### **Causes- the “What”**

The number 1 cause of stress, according to the leaders surveyed, is trying to do more with fewer resources and do it faster.

Other stress-contributing factors included;

- Developing people
- Managing limited resources
- Physical demands from travel, working hours and the work environment
- Motivating employees and providing feedback
- Making decisions
- Increased job responsibilities

Interestingly, interpersonal demands of leadership such as establishing and maintaining relationships were also cited as somewhat stressful. Managing difficult interpersonal issues such as difficult personalities, political maneuvering or conflict... not surprisingly, contributed highly as well.

### **Causes-the “Who”**

CCL’s research also sought to uncover if there was a particular person(s) within working relationships that was a primary stressor? I.e. is the boss usually the cause of stress?

Their results showed that there was no one group to “blame”. That is, leaders reported experiencing stress equally from their bosses, peers, direct reports, and customers. However, while no one group caused more stress than any other group, the reasons for the stress differed.

Stress from the boss usually tended to emerge when people felt a lack of support or respect. Management style differences were also cited as a key factor for provoking stress. From peers, being overly competitive and demonstrating no inclination toward teamwork were the primary sources of stress. From direct reports, poor performance was the primary stress factor, and from customers, experiencing unreasonable demands or unreasonable expectations.

### **How Can I Become Better at Managing my Stress?**

Probably, a good place to start would be to assess your current level of stress, more methodically and objectively. Responses to stress are very unique to the individual, and complex. We “feel” stress, but often do not have a good handle on our current stress managing “strengths” and stress-managing weaknesses or “vulnerabilities”. i.e. “my needs, my temperament, my way of looking at the world”. There are several good assessment tools available that can really help people really figure out *all* the factors involved, and target specific steps to remedy them.

*“Stress is not what happens to us. It’s our response TO what happens. And RESPONSE is something we can choose.”* Maureen Killoran

### **What Would Such an Assessment Uncover?**

- A closer examination of your current **environment**, discerning the unique changes, pressures and satisfactions that are a part of your everyday world. An opportunity to see the whole of professional and personal issues and how they manifest as stress.
- Your current **coping responses** and their effectiveness.
- Insights into your current proficiency with basic **skills** that really help you manage under stressful situations. Skills such as; how to seek support,

becoming more adaptable or learning how to manage your time more effectively.

- More discoveries into your inner world of **thoughts and feelings**. Behaviors such as having a positive outlook, connecting to others, expression and compassion are huge components in successful stress management.

### **What then?**

When you uncover the full range of factors, more intelligent choices can be made for improving. Some examples;

- Basic time management techniques can be easily learned, but an unattended behavior of procrastination or avoidance will thwart any time management technique.
- Or, consider the person who has long forgotten how to give feedback, or receive feedback in a positive way. Rediscovering the importance of expressing yourself can be most effective when coupled with proper feedback techniques.
- Knowing how and when to seek support and confide in others is hugely important in managing stress, but happens only when people trust. Exploring your current trust “radius” may provide you with more information.

An honest assessment of cause and effect will put you in a place to choose more authentically, where and who you want to be.

*"If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself but to your own estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment." Marcus Aurelius*

Call me for more information on how I can help you or your organization with stress management.

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### **Sources**

\* *Leading Effectively e-Newsletter. Center for Creative Leadership; June 2007*