

Stressed out? 3 self-help tips for managers



As a manager, you're at once trying to help your employees navigate their jobs successfully and succeed at your own. There's a lot of pressure, moving parts and time constraints, and you're feeling stressed out and overwhelmed.

Even short-term stress can affect your health. Effects of stress can include headaches, stomach issues and sleep problems. Long-term stress can contribute to health problems such as anxiety, depression, high blood pressure and heart disease.

There are a variety of valuable guides and articles on how to cope with stress and build resilience. But, assuming you're short on time and nearing your wits' end, here's a breakdown of three overarching self-help steps:

1. Take (back) time

Most days, you're running from back-to-back meetings, and taking care of whatever possible in between. You might even be working long into what should be your off hours. Feeling as if you have no control over your work or duties is the biggest cause of job stress. People who feel like they have no control at work are most likely to get stress-related illnesses. Take time for yourself, and look for ways to better manage your time.

- **Schedule time off on your calendar.** Even 30 minutes once or twice a week will give you some time to catch up and much-needed respite from the deluge of action items and mounting stress. Retrain the expectations of your team to know this is uninterrupted time you need to do your job – and don't give in when meetings are inevitably scheduled over it.
- **Get organised.** Chaos, clutter and a lack of organisation cause the psychological stress that threatens resilience. When your workstation is organised, you will feel more in control when stressors arise. Also, keep track of your projects and deadlines by making a list of what's urgent. Decide what matters most and what can wait.
- **Delegate.** Ask someone else to take on a task. It's not always important to have all the control.
- **Take a break.** If you spend every second of your day getting things done, you may resent never having time for yourself. For example, if your employer offers a flexible work schedule, use it in a way that fits your work style. Go into work earlier and take a longer break at lunch to make time for a walk or yoga.

2. Give yourself A's

While there are many stressful situations you need to address, it's likely that there are also many you can avoid, alter, adapt or accept. Here's what this means:

Avoid – You are one person – you cannot and, for your own health, should not do everything all the time. Consider currently ongoing responsibilities you can delegate or relinquish at work and at home. Even small tasks add up.

- Also, the next time you're asked to take on another duty, however small, consider its impact on your current to-do list. If it is something you want to do or you will benefit from or you are the only or best person for, then consider what you can take off your list in order to make room to take on the new task.
- If, like most people, you have trouble saying "no", a helpful hint is to thank the person for thinking of you, and tell them you'll get back to them, that you want to think about it. This gives you time to consider the ask, and gives you the time and space to turn it down or negotiate a swap.

Alter – The reality is, there are circumstances and responsibilities you will not be able to avoid. So, consider ways you can change the situation, such as via clearer communication.

- Tension on the job often comes from poor communication. Being unable to talk about your needs, concerns and frustrations can create stress. For example, if your boss keeps dumping more on you, consider whether they understand your current workload. If every time they come to you, you say "sure thing" with a confident nod, you cannot expect them to understand the stress you're feeling.
- Another helpful approach is to resolve snowballing or persistent issues. For example, if meetings always start and end late, thus backing up your whole day, institute on-time starts and ends. Let your employees know the new policy – and then make sure to stick to it yourself. Likewise, if one of your employees frequently stops by for "a quick chat" about a project, if it is not an urgent need, ask them to schedule time with you instead. That way, too, you can be prepared for the meeting, and manage your time more effectively.

Accept – When you simply cannot avoid or alter a situation, then you find a way to accept it and help yourself get through it.

- Keep in mind, it can be difficult to be objective when you feel stressed out. Try to gain perspective – is the situation as burdensome as it seems? Is there another solution to consider? Talk to someone you trust who can help provide perspective and understanding.
- Also, once you resolve the situation, think about what you can learn from it, including how it came to be, and what you could or would do differently next time a similar situation arises.

Adapt – While you cannot control what's uncontrollable, you can shift your standards or expectations to adjust. For example:

- Consider when a job is well done vs. how often you go – or need to go – far above and beyond expectations.
- Can you reframe how you're thinking about certain aspects of the job or the people to gain perspective and look on the brighter side? Perhaps one of your employees runs high drama and interacting with them stresses you out, because you tend toward rationality. You cannot change the employee's emotional nature, but you can change your reaction and approach them with more compassion.
- Consider what's best for your health. There is no shame in changing jobs, including moving from your role to a less demanding one within your current workplace or elsewhere.
- Build resilience. Part of resilience is how you think. Your mind can have a positive or negative effect on your body – the mind-body connection. People who are resilient often work to have a positive outlook. It may take gradual, small changes in your outlook and careful self-evaluation. You may be able to begin this shift on your own. A counsellor or therapist can also help you.

3. Take care of yourself

You've read and heard it a million times, but it's true: controlling stress can be an important part of your health and well-being. And getting enough sleep, regular exercise and eating a healthy diet all can help increase your energy, boost your mood and relieve stress, while contributing to your overall health and wellness.

If it's helpful, think of it as leading by example. A work environment that values employees who take care of themselves will be more productive in the long run. In addition, spending time with family and friends eases stress and helps us bounce back faster when times are rough.

Additional resources

While caring of yourself, giving yourself "A's" and taking back time are three steps you can take, and your Employee Assistance Programme can help provide more resources for managing stress and building resilience.

liveandworkwell.com/content/en/member/article.15428.html

helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-management.htm

mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044476

liveandworkwell.com/content/en/member/article.16115.html

liveandworkwell.com/en/member/article.16092.html

liveandworkwell.com/content/en/member/article.15532.html

hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-handle-the-pressure-of-being-a-manager-right-now?registration=success

apa.org/topics/stress/body

forbes.com/sites/victorlipman/2016/10/17/5-tips-to-help-managers-manage-stress-2/?sh=3a921c78371e

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