

The Wrinkle

STRESS – AN OVERVIEW Part 1

Stress is something we hear about all the time lately. It is not new, however, we have just recently been able to label the feelings of discomfort associated with stress. All of us, regardless of the simplicity of our tasks, are under stress to produce, to abide by rules and to exist compatibly on the job with co-workers. We are expected to interface with co-workers, supervisors and the general public. We are expected to perform our duties without injury to others or ourselves. Needless to say, each day brings fresh stressful conditions that we must meet.

The problem of stress is not confined to management and high-powered decision-making. It pervades any organization at each level. At times the stress causes us to view our jobs in a negative rather than positive fashion. We must continually strive to view our tasks and ourselves in a positive fashion to be safe and successful workers.

Many of us develop emotional ties to our organization. Being thus "tied" our loyalties and emotional ties become a commitment. Because of our commitment, we place ourselves under constant pressure to do a good job. This self-imposed pressure, if not countered by a realistic attitude, results in stress reaction in critical work situations. At times, these reactions can be manifested in injuries and personal burn out.

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Stress - An Overview Part 1



What we need to learn concerns the resolution of stress in critical work situations, the phenomenon of burnout and other personal problems that result from stress. These are problems a manager must deal with regarding his employees and each of us must deal with regarding our public.

THE CAUSES OF STRESS

It is not major incidents which cause stress. It is the inconsequential things like the delay in getting work orders together at the proper time. Is there someone at the dock to help unload the truck? Did all the drivers show up this morning? Are there enough forms to help get the job done? Will I have to make someone wait? No one incident is a big crisis, but when they are compounded throughout the working day, they become stress situations for us all.

There is something called a "ripple effect" from the causes of stress and it often is not directly related to any one event. The cause may be something totally removed from the work situation. Employees suffering from stress should consult with management to resolve situations before they become problems.

One of the secrets to handling stress problems is to recognize symptoms so that lapses in work processes are avoided and carelessness that results from stress situations are put in proper

perspective so that injuries, burn outs and other personal problems can be avoided. We may not even be aware stress exists until an injury occurs. We should learn to recognize the signs of stress by recognizing stressors.

RECOGNIZING STRESSORS

Recognizing stressors is something we all need to learn. Basically, there are two kinds of stress: Internal and External. Both are common to everyone, however, it is sometimes difficult for us to recognize the internal stress of others. Internal stresses are manifested in such ways as attitudes, feelings, living habits and moral standards. These symptoms, unless very obvious, may rest within many individuals we come in contact with each day. We cannot be expected to understand and deal with others stress continually, however, we need to control our own stress!

External stressors exist outside of us and many are of concern to management in the supervision of personnel. Events such as the action of others, rules and regulations and work habits may be shown as external stressors. External stressors, for example, are those such as assigning an employee a new job or providing on-the-job training and worrying about their ability to do the job. The desire to succeed and do well in the task is balanced by the fear of failure or sense of inadequacy.

Two things can happen in this situation. The stress of the situation energizes the body and mind and prepares the employee to successfully perform, or the stress response of not knowing how to perform the job manifests a fear of failure. This is an alarm phase and then the biology of stress takes over and the body goes

through a response phase that is resisting the effects of the stressor and attempting to adjust to the resulting stress.

If the stress is overcome or the stressor is removed, the body returns to normal and the stress disappears. From a simple failure to fully inform the person about a task, comes an entire body reaction that may result in negative reaction.

When our bodies are stressed for repeated events (a work task is complex and requires constant attention) or over long periods, the body's adaptive abilities are depleted and the exhaustion phase is entered. The body is no longer able to cope and has no energy to resist the effects of stress.

Often in this phase, physical symptoms or serious medical conditions develop. (Did you know it is estimated over 40% of back injury symptoms are psychosomatic reactions?)

Next Month: Part 2 Positive Stress and Reactions to Stress

QUESTIONS?

Call your supervisor or Tom Vogel in the Sacramento office.

Please email me! I need to hear from you. What are the three biggest job stresses for you? An "Excellence In Safety" safety mug to anyone who emails me!
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