



EffortlessHR – July 2008

(formerly Employer's Advantage & Professional Administrative Services, Inc.)

FYI – For Your Information Dealing with Reality in an Economic Downturn

This month the Employer's Advantage highlights stress and how to deal with it in the workplace. There can't be anything more stressful in today's marketplace than coping with an economic downturn. Gas prices are sky high, which impacts the cost of goods and services in all industries; large corporations are laying off workers; the housing market is struggling to rebound; and employees are wondering what will happen next.

Human Resource or Personnel departments are dealing with management teams planning on how to be more cost effective and looking at budgets to determine where they can trim costs. Employees are looking at how to balance their home budgets against rising costs in all commodities, while dealing with organizations who are not in a position to give increases to accommodate the cost of living increases.

All of this creates STRESS. What is the answer? There is no quick fix but there are ways companies can assist employees looking at monetary crisis.

- Talk to your insurance broker and ask if they have any programs you can present in-house to your employees to discuss:
 - Wellness and health cost saving techniques
 - Financial planning
 - Budget preparation
 - Access to financial assistance
- Communicate with your employees to make sure they are comfortable and aware of what is going on. It stops rumors and makes the employee feel a part of the process.
- Survey your clients to let them know you care and you are looking to be a resource to them during the rough times.
- Look at your budget and see where you can effectively save time and money, without compromising quality and service.

One area that might be beneficial is looking at your HR programs. The last thing you need or want is stress over a possible lawsuit. EffortlessHR provides an affordable alternative to hiring additional staff or letting go of current staff to put someone for less pay in a position where they have no training. Take a look at it and when you sign up you get the first month free (so you can see if it fits your needs).

Finally, don't be afraid to ask for help or guidance. Stress will continue to be there – you just need to learn to manage it.

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Coaching through the Chaos of Stress by JIM SIRBASKU

Unrelenting stress, the kind that many people face daily at work or at home, is debilitating. Sociologists and others often call it America's number one health problem.

Here are some striking facts about stress in everyday life:

- It's such a major factor that we have an agency devoted to the subject – the American Institute of Stress.
- The AIS estimates that stress on the job costs industry and business more than \$300 billion a year because of accidents, absenteeism, employee turnover, diminished productivity, medical/legal/insurance costs, and workers' compensation awards.
- In a University of North Carolina study, 50 percent of employees reported that they achieved less while fuming about a negative atmosphere or situation they faced.
- 20 percent said they no longer did their best work while under nonstop stress.
- A stunning 46 percent thought about quitting their jobs because of stress, and 12 percent resigned.

It is easy to see the dollars adding up and know that the \$300 billion plus price tag is not hype. For managers, the dilemma is how to coach through the chaos and get the work done without driving away the best workers.

How to do this? First, managers need specific information that tells them what's going on with each employee – preferably before the stress gets so bad that half the workforce is thinking about quitting. A manager will have a much more difficult time coaching stressed workers or teams when the symptoms of tardiness, absenteeism, conflict and poor productivity are already apparent. A preventive is in order, one that tells us where the worker needs help and how best to offer that help before he gets to the point of throwing his hands in the air and stomping out.

Here are some ideas to move you on your way:

- First, make sure your leadership or lack thereof is not creating the problem. You must know your employee, but know yourself first. Are you communicating clearly? Are the job requirements understandable? Have you kept your employees abreast of changes they need to know about?
- Assessments will show you whether the employee has the skills, motivation, interest and other competencies to do the job he or she is in. If they are lacking, a development plan is in order, or a new position in which the employee fits better.
- Understand your employees' career goals and help them understand their roles in the organization and how they fit in the big picture.
- If the stress is not coming from the employee's work situation, direct him to therapy or counseling. Managers should not take on the role of counselor unless the stress is job-related and within the manager's area of expertise.
- Encourage your employees to strive for balance in their lives, especially the workers who seem overly focused on work. The person who regularly arrives at work first and leaves last is a prime candidate for a conversation about stress.
- Direct workers to take short breaks throughout the day. If your office culture permits it, remind employees in a humorous way over the public address system.

Stress can make people behave strangely, as a story about German composer Johannes Brahms illustrates. In 1890, when he was 57, Brahms said he would retire and enjoy his remaining years. After some time had passed, he returned to composing. "I thought you weren't going to write any more," said a friend. Brahms replied that he had not intended to. "But after a few days, I was so delighted by the thought of not writing that the music came to me without effort!" Because of that respite, the world enjoys a number of Brahms' masterpieces that came between 1890 and his death in 1897.

Most employees cannot decide that easily to quit the cause of their stress, nor is that what we want to encourage. But a good leader/coach can help employees see how to take a break from the stress and perhaps develop a fresh perspective, one that allows them to rediscover delight in their work.

In this and future issues of Profiles Advantage we are focusing on the five perspectives of the coach. With this message we have examined two – whether the employee fits the job, and what motivates the employee in the job, through the prism of his/her reaction to stressful situations. Upcoming themes will look at:

- Compatibility between the employee and the manager
- Compatibility between the employee and his/her work teams
- The employee's effectiveness as a leader

We hope you are finding our ideas beneficial and are enjoying this exploration of the leader/manager as coach.

Jim Sirbasku, CEO
Profiles International

10 Positive Results of Less Workplace STRESS

1. Healthier employees
2. Decreased absenteeism and tardiness
3. Fewer on-the-job injuries
4. Less interpersonal conflict
5. Reduced turnover
6. More productivity
7. Better workplace relationships
8. Free-flowing communication
9. Fewer errors
10. Infectious good attitudes

PRODUCT FOCUS

Stressing Over 'Failure to Communicate'? Try PPI

Are you:

- Sweating over brusque conversations with employees?
- Grinding your teeth during the day *and* at night?
- Clenching your fists a lot?

A stress expert says a good antidote to this prickly problem is to sharpen one's communication skills so you can express your needs and desires. This is excellent advice. But for managers in today's busy and changing workplaces, that advice stops short of the exact words or actions required to work successfully with diverse people whom often do not think or act in similar ways.

Profiles Performance Indicator™ provides unique insight to help leaders in increasingly complex workplaces. Separate reports, one for the manager, one for the worker, describe the worker's significant job-related behavioral tendencies in five key areas:

- Control, ambition and results orientation
- Social influence, positive expectancy and expressiveness
- Patience, composure and ability to be a team player
- Precision and analytical/quality orientation
- Motivational intensity and focus on change

This edition of Employers Advantage examines workplace stress and conflict. That sounds like two areas, but they are intertwined as stress often produces conflict, and vice versa. Stress can be magnified by non-work-related problems and occurs on the job when the requirements of the work do not match an employee's capabilities, resources and/or needs. The need to control stress in the work environment, before conflict reaches a boiling point,

is increasingly important. Profiles International provides organizations with key information so that leaders can coach employees over inevitable workplace bumps.

How? The PPI assessment, a 15-minute test, measures behavioral factors that affect an employee's success. It gives managers suggestions on how to motivate the employee; whether he or she is internally motivated or externally driven; notes behavioral tendencies in critical, job-related competencies; and tells a manager the employee's response to job stress, frustration and conflict. The manager's coaching report contains essential information about productivity, quality of work, initiative, teamwork, problem solving, adapting to change, and energy. It provides specific, individualized ideas for working more productively with each person.

The report that goes to the worker provides helpful feedback – information about performance and ideas for professional growth. It aids the employee in understanding his on-the-job attitudes and behaviors. The report also offers a guide to better communication and cooperation with coworkers.

PPI works best *before* managers and workers fail to communicate. Call EffortlessHR at (520) 546-3947 to discover more effective ways to stay in touch with employees.

STRATEGIES FOR WINNING

Day Before Vacation *

Prioritize and Commit for Success

Jim and I were honored when we were inducted into the Sales Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. After the ceremony, we looked at the exhibits, including a striking representation of the motivational guru Zig Ziglar (www.zigziglar.com) delivering a speech. For decades, Zig has motivated and inspired millions of people to be better at whatever they do for a living. Zig's ideas about creating a sense of urgency are exemplified in his "Day Before Vacation" story. The exhibit inspired us to include the following strategy. This technique can have a tremendous effect on your productivity, so use it!

Think about your last day at work before you went on your most recent vacation. Didn't you get as much done in that day as you would normally get done in two, three, or even four days? (Be honest!) Look at what Zig says you did on the day before vacation.

On the night preceding the day before your vacation, you likely sat down with a piece of paper and listed all of the things that had to get finished the following day – your *gottas* (I gotta do this, and I gotta...) Then you committed that they'd all be done by the time you left the office the next day. Right?

On the morning of the day before your vacation, you arrived at the office on time – maybe even early. But you didn't head for the coffee machine. No, you went straight into the first

gotta on your list. You likely also did things in a slightly different order from usual. You took the least favored, most distasteful task on your list and got it out of the way quickly, instead of having it hanging overhead all day long (the way you normally would!) With that tough one out of the way, you were feeling pretty good, and so you tore into the next task on your list, and the next one after that. If anyone came to chat about last night's game, you politely but firmly informed that person that you were just too busy – and got back to business.

As you completed each of your *gottas*, you felt your energy rising, so that by halfway through the day you were buzzing with a sense of accomplishment that drove your enthusiasm level ever higher, raising your mood and painting a smile on your face. Your obviously energized and enthusiastic demeanor infected your colleagues. They started to ramp up effort, to smile a little more, and they became similarly enthusiastic. The atmosphere in the office got a little extra spark, and this lifted you even further.

At the end of the day, you had all of your *gottas* completed. You were as high as if you'd been on high-octane caffeine, even if you hadn't had a drop all day! You felt good. Now, that's focus!

So what did you do that day to get so focused? Let's have a look.

First, You Created a Vision

"By the time I leave tomorrow, I'll have cleared my desk and put my affairs in order so that I am free to be away for two weeks."

When your vision gets knocked offline by events around you, you are like a \$10 billion guided missile without a target. You can fly around in circles looking pretty impressive, but eventually you're going to run out of fuel and crash and burn. If your vision has been hammered by recent economic changes, get working on a new one – now! Take time to figure out what you really want for yourself, your family and your business. Get it clear in your head and paint this target in front of you every day.

Second, you Formulated a Set of Goals

...that would deliver your vision – your *gottas*. Having a great vision is useless unless you formulate clear, achievable goals to ensure that your vision becomes reality. You must plot a course to take you from where you are now to your target, with checkpoints that let you know when you go off course.

Third, You Made a Commitment

"I absolutely must get these tasks completed by the time I leave the office tomorrow."

This is the most common stumbling block that people tend to hit, even if they are accustomed to planning by creating compelling visions and formulating achievable goals. They fail to commit. If you've ever made a New Year's resolution you failed to complete,

you know what happens to plans without commitment. If there's no commitment, the fault is most likely with your vision – it simply isn't compelling enough. Otherwise, the commitment naturally would follow. If you were fatally ill and had just one month to live, but could get a cure if you had \$1 million more than your current total net worth, would you get the money? Of course you would. Or you'd kill yourself trying even before the month was out! You know that your vision is right when it has the same sense of urgency. A real commitment immediately gets you off the ground and in search of your target.

Before you spend one more day out of focus, stop and look carefully at your life. Be sure that your guidance mechanism has a clear target encoded into it, and that you've mapped a route to target that makes you want to take off right now. Get the Day-Before-Vacation feeling every day!

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