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Stressed Out!! Why Combating Stress is an Employment Relations Issue

A new CareerBuilder.com survey estimates that 75% - 95% of all doctor visits are stress-related and that at least 32 percent of workers called-in sick on more than one occasion last year.

OSHA estimates that stress-related diseases, illnesses and accidents cost American employers approximately \$300 billion annually. "Stress the Silent Killer – 'Stress Management for Life' ...," *YahooNews.com* (March 5, 2008).

Commentary and Poll

Stress is one of the biggest health issues facing employers today. Every employee faces some stress in his or her life – how each person deals with that stress determines the health risk that stress imposes.

Another survey – this one conducted by the American Psychology Association (APA) found that people experiencing stress are more likely to report hypertension, anxiety or depression, and obesity than those without stress. This survey also found that 43 percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress. "Americans Engage in Unhealthy Behaviors to Manage Stress," *American Psychiatric Association Press Release* (Feb. 23, 2006).

Among the health issues that caused by stress are anxiety disorders, which are currently the most common mental illness in the United States, affecting 40 million adults age 18 and older (18.1% of U.S. population). "Statistics and Facts About Anxiety Disorders," *Anxiety Disorders Association of America* (March 9, 2008).

Compounding the effects of stress, many people engage in unhealthy behaviors like comfort eating, poor diet choices, smoking, and inactivity to help deal with stress, and these behavior may actually lead to another tier of health problems, such as respiratory ailments and obesity.

According to the APA survey, people experiencing stress are more likely to report a number of specific ailments and symptoms. These are the symptoms reported:

- 59% feeling nervous or sad

Vote!

Do You Feel Stress from Work?

Yes

No

- 51% fatigue
- 56% inability to sleep or sleeping too much
- 55% lack of interest, motivation or energy
- 46% headaches
- 48% muscular tension
- 32% frequent upset stomach or indigestion
- 37% change in appetite
- 29% feeling faint or dizzy
- 26% tightness in chest
- 23% change in sex drive

Also according to the APA survey, these are the leading sources of stress:

- 59% money
- 59% work
- 53% health problems affecting parents or other family members
- 50% health concerns
- 50% nightly news or state of the world today
- 48% health of immediate family (spouse, partner or children)
- 41% children

With 59% of the respondents feeling stress on the job, employers should take note and provide ways to help eliminate employee stress. If you are starting a health and wellness program or have one in place, then you should deal with employee stress as soon as possible. Consider providing employees with the following tips from the Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA):

Tips to reduce stress:

- Catch those zzzzs. When stressed, your body needs sleep and rest.
- Do your best instead of trying to be perfect. Perfection isn't possible; so be proud of however close you get.
- Take a time-out. Do yoga, listen to music, volunteer, or get a massage. Stepping back from the problem lets you clear your head.
- Accept that you cannot control everything. Put your stress in perspective: is it really as bad as you think?
- Take deep breaths. Inhale and exhale slowly.
- Count to 10 slowly. Repeat, and then count to 20 if necessary.
- Use humor. A good laugh goes a long way.
- Keep moving. Regular exercise releases mood-enhancing chemicals.
- Try to keep a positive attitude. Replace negative thoughts with positive ones.
- Eat well-balanced meals. Don't skip meals, including breakfast. Do keep healthy, energy-boosting snacks on hand.
- Talk to someone. Let friends, family, or a doctor know you're feeling overwhelmed, and tell them how they can help.

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