



Stress Management As A Leadership Opportunity

10 Strategies for Leading through Stress

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"To whom much is given, much is expected". Although this age-old adage can be attributed to a variety of sources, one thing that is certain is that it is a poignant reminder for all of us who are called to lead in the 21st century.

At a foundational level, leadership is a gift and a huge responsibility which must be honored. After all, who else is provided with countless opportunities each day to influence and impact people's lives in so many ways? While the responsibilities are many and at times burdensome, we must never lose sight of these opportunities nor take them for granted.

One of the most pressing challenges facing leaders today is the accelerating pace of change and the constant drive to do more with less. Add to this the uncertainty of the global economy and its resulting fallout and most workplaces today are experiencing an unparalleled level of stress and anxiety.

To be sure, there are huge bodies of research available on the impact of workplace stress today. Much of which, offer a compelling case for why organizations of all types need to address this near epidemic. However, a much smaller body of work has been written about the leader's role in managing stress.

When we consider the wide scope and resulting impact of our influence, we begin to grasp the importance of our role in managing workplace stress. Although as leaders we often must endure a broader range of stress factors, we are obligated to be role models of the behaviors that drive team and organizational success. It is within this context that we begin to discover the opportunity.

10 things that you can do now to turn stress into a leadership opportunity:

1. Consider how you manage stress and what impact it has on team engagement and overall morale.
2. Initiate a conversation with your team or peer group about how they manage stress in a healthy and effective way.
3. Invest 5 minutes to complete the free *Workplace Stress Management Inventory* on the WorkChoice Solutions web site @ www.workchoicesolutions.com - Key words, *Learning Resources, Leadership Assessments*.
4. Identify one development opportunity related to your stress management inventory results and map-out a series of small, doable steps that you will take between now and year end.
5. Seek input from your team and other key stakeholders about the range of role model opportunities that are presented during times of stress. Also identify the key behaviors that support being a positive role model in each scenario.
6. Using a scale of one to 10, with one being the equivalent of a minor hassle and 10 being a true catastrophe, assign a number to whatever it is that's making you feel anxious. You'll find that most problems we encounter rate somewhere in the one to five range — in other words, they're really not such a big deal.
7. Create an affirmation or personal mantra. A short, clear and positive statement that focuses on your coping abilities can be very powerful. Affirmations are a good way to silence the negative self-talk voice we all carry with us that only adds to our stress. The next time you feel as if your life is one disaster after another, repeat 10 times, "I feel calm. I can handle this."
8. Practice mindfulness. Heighten your awareness of the moment by focusing intently on an object. Notice a pencil's shape, color, weight and feel. Or slowly savor a raisin or a piece of chocolate. Mindfulness leads to relaxation.
9. Just say no. Trying to do everything is a one-way ticket to serious stress. Be clear about your limits and stop trying to please everyone all the time.
10. Ask for help. Effective stress management involves; awareness, taking responsibility, choices, action and commitment. Sometimes it requires external resources too so don't be afraid to seek help when necessary. All of the important people in your life are counting on you.

About David A. O'Brien

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness consulting and training services that was founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, non-profit and public sector clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. Additionally, his articles have appeared in a wide range of local, regional and national publications. To learn more, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at www.workchoicesolutions.com or contact David directly at 860.242.1070.