

## Stress in the Workplace

From encouraging us to do our best to making us feel overwhelmed to, in the extreme, pushing individuals to “go postal” and hurt others physically, stress in the workplace can bring about a variety of outcomes. And it can come from a variety of sources—personal issues such as financial difficulties, broken relationships, health problems, etc.; or work issues such as poor training, natural and artificial deadlines, the ebbs and flows of work, staff or other changes in the work environment, not taking breaks or vacations, or even from bad supervision. It seems to be in the air we breathe in our country and economy these days, and we seem to have to run faster each year to stay in the same place.

Our goal as an employer desiring to encourage healthy work environments where employees can focus on the mission of serving Christ through their positions can't be to eliminate all workplace stress. But we can assess the causes of stress at our particular parishes and schools, and where we can make a difference, strategize some solutions. Our own health and the health of our employees and worksite may lie in the balance.

### Identify the Causes

Whether you use a confidential survey compiled by a third-party or ask for input at a staff meeting on the causes of stress at your worksite, it is important to hear from employees and to try to find any commonly recognized specific causes. Certain of these may be completely out of your control to affect, but even talking about them together can help to alleviate the stress they cause, and to help your employees cope with them together.



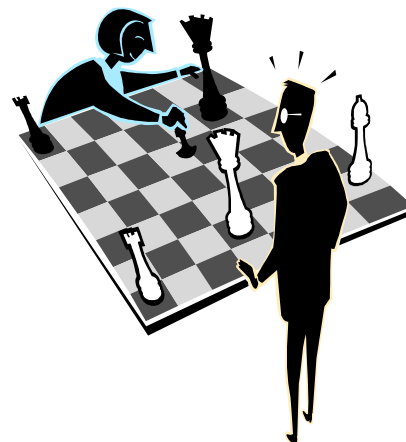
Some causes that you do have control over might be related to how you supervise your employees, how information is communicated, any training deficits your employees may have for the work they are being asked to do, lack of clarity in job responsibilities, personality conflicts, differing senses of the mission, or a humor deficit in the work environment. These you as leader can do something about. You may not be able to “fix” them quickly, and even thinking of approaching them may cause feelings of defensiveness or fear. But if you break them down, prioritize, and perhaps run your list by someone outside your worksite, you should be able to come up with a few identifiable causes that aren't too grandiose or unwieldy to work on in the coming months.

### Strategize the Solutions

Your list of identified causes should start to suggest their own solutions. However, it is important to consider your strategy of approach. There may be relationships among the causes, such that

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it becomes clear that one is a root cause. This might be the best place to focus on a solution. Working on this root cause could alleviate stress brought about by related causes. Another possible strategy could be to start with the stress maker that, if reduced or eliminated, could have some effect immediately. That way the employees see a change right away, and that alone could lower the general level of stress, making any later work on other causes of stress easier. A third strategy is to think out of the box—use surprise, creativity, inspiration, a musical touch, whatever might bring a fresh perspective or new way of responding. Usually then pride and “doing things the way they’ve always been done” make way for beautiful moments, human care and common sense to indicate the pathway to a less stressful work environment. Once you have your strategy of approach, lining up the resources you need to implement your solutions from your own work team, from this Office (we can help with training, book suggestions, and consultation on all manner of employment and relational issues in the work place), or from other sources shouldn’t be difficult.



### Set the Tone to Reduce Stress

You as the leader set the tone, whether you intend to or not. If you are overworking or not taking your vacations, your employees will likely follow your example. If your work isn’t fun in some sense to you, you probably set that tone in your worksite, causing an incubator for stress. Take stress seriously in your workplace. Encourage your employees to find their own healthy solutions to the normal stresses of work, or organize some group ones—team walks around the neighborhood for 15 minutes in the middle of the afternoon a couple days a week, a “best joke of the week” competition, or a deep breathing exercise before each staff meeting begins in earnest. Life has a way of sending us the solutions once we are open to them. Let workplace stress be your guide, not your obstacle, to nurturing a productive healthy work environment.



### Those Personal Issues

It may be that the root cause of workplace stress comes from an employee who is not dealing with their personal issues (or not dealing with them well). Fortunately, as a manager you have a tool that you didn’t have before—the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can refer your employee (whether they are eligible for benefits or not) to them at (866) 248-4104 (24 hours/day—7 days/week) for up to 8 free counseling sessions per issue per year (per family member). Or if you need their participation in the EAP to be mandatory, you can call the same number during regular business hours and ask to speak with a licensed Workplace Support Specialist to work out a plan and make a formal referral.

Please call any of us in Human Resources if you have questions—(415) 614-5540