



OCTOBER 2016

THE BUSINESS NEWSLETTER FROM AUSWILD & CO
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MANAGING STRESS

At some time or other, we all get stressed. It could be related to work, family, decisions, our future and a myriad of other things and issues. Stress can cause physical, emotional, and behavioural problems which can affect our health, energy, well-being, and our relationships. It can also cause defensiveness, lack of motivation, concentration problems, accidents, reduced productivity and conflict.

Managing stress well is not easy. It takes time and practice. However, developing coping skills is important for our overall health and well-being. The following are some suggestions from **Susan Heathfield** that will help us manage the stress in the workplace.

Control, time allocation and goals

Set realistic goals and time frames. Setting realistic goals for the day (or month or year) helps us feel directed and in control. Goals give us a yardstick against which we can measure every time commitment.

Scheduling more than we can handle is a great stressor. Not only do we get stressed trying to handle commitments, we are stressed just thinking about them. Learning to say "No" will help us to reduce some overload. Eliminating any activities which we don't have to do and carefully considering any time-based commitments we make will also assist.

We should schedule each goal and activity we commit to accomplish – not just appointments. If a report will take us two hours to write, we should schedule the two hours. If reading and responding to e-mails takes an hour a day, schedule that hour. Consider the use of a diary or electronic planner.

Reconsider all meetings

Is that meeting really necessary? An effective meeting serves an essential purpose – it is an opportunity to share information and/or to solve a critical problem. Meetings should only be held when interaction is required. Meetings can work to our advantage or they can weaken our effectiveness at work. If much of our time is spent attending ineffective, time-wasting meetings, we limit our ability to accomplish more important objectives at work.

The Wall Street Journal quoted a study that estimated 80% of the time people wasted in meetings could be saved by doing two things: start and end meetings on time and stick to an agenda.

Don't be all things to all people – control time

Make time for the most important commitments and take time to figure out what these are. Time management is a systematic approach to the time of our lives applied consistently. The basis of time management is the ability to control events.

There are two major issues about control. The first is that each of us is really in control and in charge of more events than we generally would like to acknowledge. The second is that some things are uncontrollable. Trying to control the uncontrollable is a key to stress and unhappiness.

Make time decisions based on analysis

Take a look at how you currently divide your time. Do you get the little, unimportant things completed first because they are easy and their completion makes you feel good? Or, do you focus your efforts on the things that will really make a difference for your organisation and your life?

Events and activities fall into one of four categories –

- Not Urgent and Not Important
- Urgent but Not Important
- Not Urgent but Important
- Urgent and Important

You need to spend the majority of your time on items that fall in the last two categories.

Manage procrastination

Like most people, we procrastinate for three reasons – we don't know how to do the task; we don't like to do the task; or, we feel indecisive about how to approach the task.

Deal with procrastination by breaking the large project into as many small manageable, instant tasks as possible. Make a written list of every task. List the small tasks on your daily, prioritised "To Do List". Reward yourself after completion. If you do procrastinate, you'll find that the task gets bigger and bigger and more insurmountable in your own mind. Just do it!

Susan Heathfield is a management consultant specialising in human resource related systems, issues and opportunities. She is a professional speaker and trainer on topics ranging from interpersonal relationships, organisation effectiveness, management excellence, and marketing services. Susan has both a Bachelors and a Masters degree from the University of Michigan.

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*We heard on the grapevine that **Bob & Wendy Todd** snuck away and were married in Fiji recently. **CONGRATULATIONS** Bob & Wendy!*