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Women and Workplace Stress: It's More than the Job!

By Jennifer Wright

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It's More than the Job: Women and Workplace Stress!

Stress in the workplace has become a occupational health and safety risk worldwide, including the U.S. Debate centers around who is responsible for illness related to stress if the workplace is contributing. Research shows that a majority of work-related stress is borne out of attrition and the requirement for more in less time by employees. Our own culture of speed, convenience, and instant gratification also drives our stress reactions.

Is women's workplace stress different than that of men's?

Since stress, by definition, is the body's response physiologically and psychologically to a "dangerous situation", it stands to reason that what is perceived as dangerous in the work place is very individual. Research shows that women's stress in the workplace is related more to lack of balance and demands of home and work combined, and men's workplace stress related more to the job.

Research also shows that women in relationships do greater than 60% of household maintenance and childcare. Divorced and single women, living alone, more than likely have 80-100% of childcare responsibilities as well as the household chores. Consequently, women are likely to have obstacles finding time for their own stress reducing self-care. Women are more likely to arrive to work, stressed before their workplace demands begin.

Perceived locus of control is one area proven to be a predictor of stress. Therefore a woman working in an environment with little flexibility or choice would be a greater risk of distress than a climate of no-voice. Would it stand to reason that women therefore, that women with their own businesses would be less stressed than those working for someone else? Interestingly, women's stress issues do not vary significantly. Women are multi-taskers by nature and enfold tasks within tasks. Work, family and home are not separate and the issues around balance prevail regardless of working for yourself or

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someone else. Women who own their own business have the same childcare and home issues as their sisters who are working for someone else. However, women, working in their own business are likely to be pursuing a passion and adopt a mindset that allows a positive attitude.

So, what some ways that woman can reduce work place stress?

1. Recognize that stress is a killer and not to be taken lightly.

Stress related illnesses are the leading cause of death and disability in women today. Recognition is the first step in any change process.

2. Take real breaks from work.

If your business requires that you be on the job at "normal" lunch times or other break times, make

sure that you find time at other times in the day. Studies show that small breaks actually increase our efficiency, so you really can "afford" it. Walking outside can work wonders. Have a pair of walking shoes on site.

3. What, in your work environment, are you "tolerating" and allowing for on-going stress?

Cluttered space, equipment that needs repaired, lack of organization, tasks that need to be delegated, noise level, ergonomically unhealthy workplaces, and any number of other tolerations are worth the effort to resolve.

4. Communicating cleanly and assertively is a great way to reduce stress by addressing boundaries, expectations and needs in the workplace.

Women, many times, communicate on an emotional level. Unfortunately, with this sort of communication, the real message is lost in the feeling versus the doing.

5. Caffeine, by its very nature, causes a physiological stress response.

How much coffee or high caffeine soft drinks do you consume at work? Take steps to reduce or cut out caffeine all together. Increase your water intake.

6. Eat a good breakfast.

Studies show that eating breakfast is one of the healthiest habits we can adopt. Our bodies and brain has been without carbohydrate fuel for 12 hours or more. Time to fill up. Smoothies are great ways to get a great boost on the go. Yogurt, fruit, juice and a blender and you can start your day with protein, good carbohydrate, calcium and vitamins. Add some linseeds/flaxseeds and you have fiber and phytoestrogens too. All are significant for women's good health!

7. Ideas you might like to try at the work place for stress reduction.

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Calming oils of floral scents (rose, vanilla, lavender and nutmeg), a tennis ball to roll back and forth under the ball of your foot, and massage an acupuncture calm point in the area of the hand between the index finger and thumb.

8. Self-care outside the workplace is of paramount importance for women.

Adequate sleep provides our bodies with chemical balancing and healing at a cellular level. Find out what needs to "give" to get you to bed for 7–8 hrs of sleep. Eating a diet of real food (limit or eliminate additives and chemicals) that fuels our bodies gives us a reserve to run on during stressful time. Exercise, though hard to timetable in our packed schedules is a great stress reducer.

9. Learn ways to relax that are meaningful for you.

This might seem like an obvious, overused, token suggestion. Most women do not really know how to relax. We have been so programmed to look after everything and everyone else. This feeling of responsibility carries over into our work as well. Learning what is relaxing to you is worth the effort. Turn off the T.V. Call a friend. Listen to some relaxing music. Commit to picking up an interest from the past, even if you do it in small steps. Time taken for pleasure will pay off in the long run in work

efficiency.

10. Do not stress about reducing stress and make it "another stress".

Pay attention to you body's response to situations. What is your self talk? Make an effort to take deep breaths and change on-going negative talk to positive.

Workplace stress through our legislations is becoming an issue for which employers must take notice. However, the current lean operations of business, which is the one of the contextual issues cited for today's stress, will not go away. For those of us who run our own businesses, we are our own employers. As women, we need to discern what is work stress. As women, we need to acknowledge what we can do for ourselves to reduce stress. We need to remember that old saying, if you don't look after yourself, no one else will. Honour your self!

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Your Work and Your Stress

By Catherine Pulsifer

We all want less stress in our lives. Do you think today's workplace is too stressful?

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I know at times it may be difficult to accept, but, you and only you can control your stress.

Stress is not only created by how we see a situation, but also how we react to it. We do, in fact, control our own stress. So, if you are feeling "stressed out", you are responsible for creating that feeling.

I am not saying there are no situations which are stressful. What I am saying, however, is that how you choose to react to those situations will determine your own stress levels. These reactions will affect how you behave, how you communicate with those around you, and how you respond to your customers and clients.

When I start to feel stress, I ask myself a question: "how much will this matter in five years?" In the majority of cases, it doesn't matter. It is amazing, how this one, simple question can change your thought processes, and lower your stress levels resulting in less stress.

Another technique I use when my job seems overwhelming is to keep it all in perspective by saying to myself: "My job is important but it only forms part of my life – it is not my entire life." So, by thinking this way, I am altering my thoughts from one where my job controls and rules my entire life to one where I realize my job forms only a part of my life's equation.

So the next time you feel your job is causing you stress, ask yourself how am I reacting? You may find that it is not your job creating the stress but you are creating the stress.

We all need some stress in our lives, but less stress is better than more stress!

Catherine Pulsifer is one of the authors of *Stress Less Country* – a lifestyle change! A journey to a simplified lifestyle – visit the site for a collection of articles, thoughts, quotes, and stories on: simplicity, stress, gardening, recycle & reuse, country crafts, saving money tips, and Atlantic Canada.

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