



STRESS AT WORK

Whether you are the employer or the worker, keeping stress at work down really pays dividends for all concerned. The first place to start in avoiding stress at work, for both employer and employee, is at recruitment. It is most important to place a "round peg in a round hole". If this can be done, then the worker will be suited to the job and will be most productive and happy in their job, and so will their manager and employer.

Taking great care in recruitment means thinking about the full job description, having it ready before you start advertising and interviewing, and thinking about the skills and the personality of the person required to do this job well.

The next thing is to have an understanding of where stress from work comes from. OSH has described the two main areas that can cause stress at work as the **Content** of the work and the **Context** of the work.

The content of the work are the "nuts and bolts" of the work. By that we mean the everyday activities that are involved - whether there is time pressure or overload involved in this work, whether there is a "juggling of many balls" and whether there are excessive demands made on the person during the course of the work. The content of the work also includes whether there are physical strains like excessive noise or extremes of temperature involved in the work.

The context of the work involves how the work is organised and how the person is managed. What is the organisational culture? How well is this person managed by their manager? Are they appreciated for the work that they do? Are there good career prospects for them? Is there any bullying or negative cultures within this workplace? Does the worker feel that they are working with like minded, positive people in a co-operative way to achieve common goals

An important influence on performance and resilience are how well the worker looks after themselves. They need to be fit for work and so they need to know about looking after their health, diet, exercise and sleep. Having a secondary job needs to not interfere with their ability to stay well for their primary job.

How much does personal life and personality impinge on a person's ability to work? There are many women in the workforce now that are running the family home, the children and doing far more on top of their daily job. These women are at risk of overload. Sometimes a workers personal life stresses can make them more vulnerable to events at work that they would normally manage well. Although it is not the employer's job to mother their workers, a good employer knows how far into the grey zone to go in supporting a worker when necessary. In this regard sometimes providing counselling or other support can be a good investment for all concerned.

OSH suggests that employers manage stress at work like any other hazard. To this end, it is important to regularly review a workers performance with them and not wait for a whole year to tell them that they have not been doing well.

Just like managing a physical hazard like noise, it is possible to manage stress in a way to allow it to be eliminated, isolated or for workers to be protected from stress at work. This can be done by

encouraging everyone to be aware of what is going on at work that could increase stress. I don't believe stress surveys are necessarily helpful because workers may not be completely frank.

Workers are required by OSH to participate with their employers to identify hazards and help with reducing any hazard including stress at work.

Lastly it is important to continually audit how everyone's efforts are going and to make changes as you go.