

## Keep Alert -

### Workplace Stress Can Affect Anyone

The best workplace environment in the world will not automatically prevent workplace stress.

That's because everyone copes with stress differently and what might be an exciting challenge for one person may be terribly stressful for the next.

Workplace stress is the result of what happens between a person and their working environment. The person feels stressed when they don't feel they can cope with the demands of their work environment.

As an employer, you need to keep alert for signs of stress in your workplace, and have systems in place to support your team and deal with issues as they arise.

If fact, you are legally bound under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 to ensure the safety of your employees while at work. But the law can appear grey as to what you have to provide and how employers deal with workplace stress - how, for instance do you approach someone who is experiencing workplace stress, when it is influenced by personal trauma?



### Talk and Listen

You cannot always prevent stress happening, but if you know what's going on with your team, you can then do something to alleviate or eliminate the stress.

Communication's the key - talking to your team as well as listening to what's happening with them. But that'll only happen if you create an environment, or a culture, which encourages open communication.

Some business leaders say the culture of an organisation is the most important thing in running a business. It can't be overlooked.

Unfortunately though, many small business owners are so busy running their business they don't always pay full attention to the needs of their team. In fact they are your most important priority. Without them you wouldn't have a business.

Yes, you do have a business to run, but first and foremost you are a people manager. If you have time for only one thing, it must be as a leader for your team.

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## Build Systems Around Your Culture

Secondly you need to establish excellent systems to support the culture you have created. For example, systems should include regular times for meeting with your staff to discuss work-in-progress, policies, procedures, social events and so on.

Give staff the opportunity to have input into how things are run. Respect their ideas and suggestions - don't assume you have all the answers.

Also consider regular one-on-one meetings with team members. This is the chance for them to talk about any issue bothering them. That requires trust though so don't expect results immediately. But trust will build (and with it the culture of your working environment) if you demonstrate the importance of these meetings. They should be rock solid in your diary.

## Act on Stress

If a team member does come to you with an issue causing them stress at work, you need to treat the issue with utmost importance. Work with the person to determine the best path forward, talking with other parties if necessary to reach a solution.

If the issue is not work-related you can offer your best support by really listening to the person's concerns and, if appropriate, suggesting temporary adjustments to their working environment, for example reducing workloads, changing shifts, or transferring into less demanding areas. The health and safety of your team are your priority.

Good information on managing stress in the workplace, including a wide range of publications, is available at these websites: [www.osh.govt.nz](http://www.osh.govt.nz) and [www.workinfo.govt.nz](http://www.workinfo.govt.nz).

A great working environment, one in which employees can have fun while being dedicated to their work at the same time, will go a long way to fostering a happy team of people.



## Next Steps - Build a Culture; Alleviate Stress

You can't prevent stress happening but you can take action to nip it in the bud before it takes hold. To do that you need to build a workplace culture that thrives on open communication:

- Make the team your priority - if you started out as a sole operator, the business relied on you for everything. When you take on staff, your primary role becomes one of people manager.
- Establish systems to foster open communication - meet regularly together, as well as individually with team members, so that everyone has the chance to talk and make suggestions, and you have the chance to listen to concerns.
- Act on stress immediately - you must support team members who are experiencing workplace stress. Numerous publications can help steer you. (See [www.osh.govt.nz](http://www.osh.govt.nz) and [www.workinfo.govt.nz](http://www.workinfo.govt.nz)).
- Work as a team - give staff input into the running of the business; take all ideas and suggestions seriously; keep them in the picture constantly.

*Be sure to read each article with the mindset "How this could apply to our business". Thinking of it that way will guarantee that you get value. Also make copies for each team member. To really make sure something positive happens, work with your business development specialists to talk your team through ideas.*



[www.temperton.co.nz](http://www.temperton.co.nz)

## Spark Workplace Energy with *FISH*

If morale is flagging at your workplace, hook into a copy of the book *FISH*, by Stephen C. Lundin, Harry Paul and John Christensen. This fabulous, quick read follows the efforts of a Seattle manager, Mary Jane, in turning her 'toxic energy dump' working environment into a fun, vibrant place to be.

Upon discovering the pulsating energy at the famous Pike Place Fish market nearby, she soon learns how the fish guys find fun in their everyday work. They teach her that it's all about how you approach your work - the attitude you bring with you to the workplace, the fun you have while you're there, and how you engage with, and relate to, your colleagues and customers.

Mary Jane then works through a process of change with her team. Together they clean up their 'toxic energy dump' and create a more fun-loving, productive culture, where people feel their work is valued.

This is a must-read for anyone leading a business or managing a team, who wants to bring back a spark of energy and creativity to the workplace.

*FISH*, by Stephen C. Lundin, Ph.D., Harry Paul and John Christensen, Hodder and Stoughton, GB, 2001.



*"There is always a choice about the way you do your work, even if there is not a choice about the work itself."*

*FISH*, by Stephen C. Lundin, Ph.D., Harry Paul and John Christensen, Hodder and Stoughton, GB, 2001.

## Advertorials as Advertising Alternative

When you've got great news to tell, you can't do better than tell your local news media - a story in the paper is advertising money can't buy.

The key is 'newsworthiness'. The media is interested in stuff that's new, different, controversial, successful. They will generally want to know if your business has just launched into an offshore market, or has developed a trail-blazing product which changes the way we do something, for example.

But if you simply want to promote awareness of your business, consider advertorials.

### Say What You Want

These are articles about your business written by you (or a skilled writer). They are treated as an advertisement by the papers so you pay to have them printed, but the real benefit is that you can say what *you* want. Where a typical ad is short and to the point, advertorials allow you to get across more detail about your business in story form.

Most newspapers put the words 'advertisement' in small letters above the article, but advertorials can attract readers who might be suspicious of adverts. Articles can help endorse a product.

And, because the article is yours, you can re-use it in other papers, or even copy it for use as a brochure.

Like ordinary display advertising, the price of the advertorial is worked out on the number of column centimetres. The price is generally higher if you want the article on a particular page, although some papers offer sports and business pages without the extra loading.

### Commercial Features

For new business launches, many regional papers offer 'commercial feature pages'. The newspaper runs a feature - one or several pages - which is paid for by advertising from your own business and the subcontractors who helped in its establishment. The main part of the feature will be an article, written by a reporter who would interview you.

## Equip Yourself for Marketing Decisions

Do you make marketing decisions impulsively or are they based on research and analysis?

Flashes of inspiration *can* ignite a successful campaign but planning ahead can never be taken lightly. If you want to steer your decisions in the right direction you'd be wise to continually monitor the market.

You need to monitor and analyse what is happening around you. For example, with your competitors: when do they have sales, which products do they markdown and by how much, and how do the buyers react?; as well as your own customers: how much do they buy, how often and how do they make their buying decisions? This research will better equip you to make sound marketing decisions.



### Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What are your competitors doing - are there patterns to their price changes or the kinds of items they promote during the year? What do they markdown and when?
- What's the best time to markdown seasonal goods - early on or an end-of-season clearance sale? Monitor what happens with annual sales - if they're really popular, do customers wait for these rather than buying in season?
- What kind of customer are you appealing to - those who buy on price alone; on quality alone; or to those who combine the two? Knowing this will confirm the messages you include in your marketing material.
- How do your customers get information and make competitive comparisons - through newspaper advertising, browsing the shops or word-of-mouth? Knowing this will confirm the best way to promote a sale, a new product or a special customer evening.
- What happens when you change prices - which items stay on the shelves if you raise prices? Which items appeal to customers when you run sales? Do they buy more if you offer multiple pricing (lower price when buying in multiples)?
- When you do change a price, do your customers know about it through price tags? And, do you time price reductions with your advertising?

If you've monitored the market and how your customers buy during the year, you'll have the numbers and the facts on which to base your decisions. Taking a stab in the dark as far as marketing goes could be a winner, but it could just as easily bomb. And in a competitive market, is that worth the risk?

### An important Message

*While every effort has been made to provide valuable, useful information in this publication, this firm and any related suppliers or associated companies accept no responsibility or any form of liability from reliance upon or use of its contents. Any suggestions should be considered carefully within you own particular circumstances, as they are intended as general information only.*

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