

# THE LAST WORD

When stress builds in pressured work environments



**JANICE HADDON  
OFFERS SOME TIPS  
ON HANDLING  
STRESS**

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**W**e all experience pressure, to one degree or another, almost every day. But what happens when the stress we encounter exceeds our capacity to cope?

In the short-term, excess stress triggers the ‘fight or flight’ response. When a situation becomes too stressful, our brain relies on these instinctive behaviours.

However, not all stress is bad. In small doses, stress can be good. It can be a motivator. It can drive people forward. It can focus a person on a specific activity or goal. Some people thrive on stress, on being under pressure. In some, it can increase performance levels and output. But what motivates one person can demotivate another. And that is something that businesses, organisations and leaders need to be mindful of. In a high-pressure environment, stress can build quickly and, for some, it can have quite damaging effects.

A prolonged exposure to anxiety and stress can leave people depleted, overwhelmed and unable to cope with daily challenges.

The best way to combat stress is by recognising its warning signs. Stress affects people in different ways, but its main symptoms include: headaches, muscle tension, poor concentration and communication, anxiousness, sleeplessness and even insomnia. In the workplace, you may find colleagues or employees suffering from stress to be irritable, moody and short-tempered.

In a high-pressure environment, it is difficult to ensure that people flourish, and that performance and resilience levels remain high. It’s a delicate balance that takes careful management. In organisations where there is a great deal of pressure and a poor balance, a culture of stress, negativity and ill health can quickly develop.

There are numerous ways for businesses to avoid this negative spiral, but communication is key. It’s important to temper expectations when needed and celebrate successes. Also, a workplace that encourages conversation and open discussion – rather than one that is stifled by the pressure of getting things done to tight timescales – is more likely to promote innovation and creativity and achieve results.

An organisation operates at its best when its employees are satisfied and motivated to succeed. If your business environment is poorly managed, and employees are not producing, a change is needed. If individuals are unable to ‘switch-off’ outside of work, if their work-life balance isn’t quite right, then that stress will affect their behaviour and performance.



Building inner resilience is the key for individuals to be able to handle a busy working environment and a never ending ‘to do list’. When people are resilient they perform at their best, communication is good and people are able to work hard, while also placing sufficient emphasis on personal wellbeing.

To be healthy in the work place, everyone needs to pay attention to work life balance and a 360 approach to health, these can include:

- Forward planning so you know what is ahead and what deadlines need to be met
- Have healthy snacks available to keep energy levels up
- Take a break – stretching and moving for 5 minutes can help to boost oxygen levels and energy in your system
- Pay attention to communication – treat others with respect
- Be aware of your own personal triggers and what might irritate or tip you over the edge
- Don’t dwell on things you can’t control
- Pay attention to work life balance
- Be personally accountable for your own performance and wellbeing.

When we pay conscious attention to ourselves, our colleagues and our environment, we can remain resilient and perform at our best in any situation. If organisations and individuals do that, a high-pressured environment can be where people flourish.