



Trends

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Stress Management--Desk Rage is More Common in the Workplace

As any manager can tell you, frustration and office temper tantrums by employees are not unusual, but two studies indicate that incivilities in the workplace appear to be increasing. Termed “desk rage” by one survey, it includes arguments between employees, pen throwing managers, and workers kicking expensive computer equipment in fits of aggravation.

In a telephone survey commissioned by Integra Realty Resources, Inc., nearly one-third of 1,305 workers who responded admitted to yelling at someone in the office and 65% said workplace stress is at least occasionally a problem for them. Work stress had driven 23% of the respondents to tears and 34% blamed their jobs for a loss of sleep.

In a separate study published in the quarterly journal, *Organizational Dynamics*, it was found that workers who experienced rude behavior at work had reactions that were negative for business. Nearly a third of them admitted intentionally decreasing their commitment to the company, with a quarter indicating that they stopped doing their best. Almost 12% of the rudeness recipients quit their jobs to search for friendlier environments.

Workplace stress is not new, but many experts and workers feel that it is at epidemic levels. Several economic and social trends have escalated tensions or at least made employees more sensitized to stress. Layoffs and downsizing have left a lingering sense of job insecurity for many workers, while demands for productivity have increased.

At the same time, the nature of the American workforce has changed. It is more diverse—including women, multiple generations, and ethnicity--which can exacerbate on-the-job tensions. There is a sense that the technology that was supposed to make jobs easier-- from cell phones to e-mail to PDAs--has turned into high-tech leashes. Referred to as “technology tethers” by C. Leslie Charles in her book, *Why Is Everyone So Cranky?*, she feels American workers are overwhelmed, overworked, overscheduled and overspent.

“We’re leading these non-stop lives, and we’re continuing to accelerate the pace,” according to Charles. “We are so preoccupied with what we’re doing and what’s next that we have an inability to process what’s just happened or what’s bugging us.”

Charles recommends the following tools to de-stress your work life:

- Fortify your “emotional immune system (EIS).” When exposed to crankiness, stop and quantify the problem and put it in perspective. Is this a small, medium or large annoyance or something more serious? How large of a response is required? Make your reaction match the size of the problem.
- Take a “Reality Bite.” Expecting, waiting and hoping for things to be different in our lives only increases our susceptibility for crankiness. Expect some parts of life to be frustrating; you will wait in lines that are too long, people will do things that irritate you, and you will encounter inconvenience more days than not. Accept this reality. Let it roll off your back and smile. It may not change what is happening, but you will feel better.
- Take time out for a "Personal Battery Recharge." What do you really enjoy doing? When was the last time you did it? Take the time to recharge. Whether a game of golf, a walk with a friend, or reading a book, take the time for renewal as often as possible.

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