

## Do Stigmas Create Stress in Your Organisation?

Many people in organisations carry stigmas around stress, often without even being aware of it. You might hear things like "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen" or even "Lunch is for wimps"! Whether it's a 'protestant work ethic', or a 'macho' working environment, or just a way of dealing with the daily pressures of life...these 'hidden beliefs' often add to the stresses that many people are already feeling in their everyday lives.

It sometimes means that people don't want to talk about how they are coping (or not coping!) with the day-to-day pressures or how they are responding to long working hours and difficult challenges of a competitive environment. So it goes underground - people feel isolated and vulnerable if they are struggling to handle the pressure. In some workplaces the effect is endemic - it's hurting people, hurting organisations, and hurting the bottom line. In the current economic climate the effect is magnified.

Often the 'organisational view' is that dealing with issues of stress and employee well-being is something 'we can't afford' or 'haven't got time to do', certainly at the moment. It's perceived as 'too soft' or 'pandering to people's weaknesses'. Often the counter view that prevails is "we need to get tougher, and leaner and meaner"! But the reality is that to get tougher as an organisation, we also need to take our heads out of the sand and face the tough reality that stress happens, it is all around us. The worst effects of stress destroy productivity and sometimes even destroy people.

Once we recognise that fact, we can see the enormous opportunity this creates for every organisation. How to get people working much more effectively under pressure. It's not rocket science, if you plot the graph

for most people you will see that their productivity or 'work performance' increases to a peak and then drops like a stone as the pressure continues to rise. Often without a person being aware of this happening. If we were observing a machine, we might say "OK, so how can we keep the pressure around the level where the machine is always delivering maximum performance?" Once you know that, you've found the optimum way of working.

And exactly the same applies to any human being. The awareness and understanding that let's you manage where you are on your own 'performance versus pressure curve' is all that it takes for you to really get the best out of yourself, your team and your organisation.

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