

Before the storm breaks

Watch out for danger signs when the storm clouds of stress start gathering within you

STUDIES show that stress is on the rise, especially stress levels in the workplace.

Stress gets in the way as it adversely impacts people-to-people interaction. And when it remains unchecked, it can lead to a breakdown in communication, to anger, even to rage.

There is a business cost — in reduced productivity, lower levels of quality, increased absenteeism and higher levels of staff turnover.

There is a human cost too — in lower staff morale, reduced self-esteem, impact on career path and personal growth aspirations and, sometimes, a decline in health.

Stress and emotions

Stress is a necessary part of performance improvement. You always need a little to spur you on, to stretch you as you make progress. That said, the excesses can be bothersome.

It is not all bad news though, as stress comes in two forms: positive and negative.

Positive stress associates with positive emotions, such as satisfaction, happiness or delight. It is about the good feelings you have when you exercise or achieve something.

Positive stress provides you with drive, allows you to grow, fuels your ambitions and feeds your successes.

When harnessed effectively, it can be constructive, productive and in-

tensely enjoyable.

Negative stress, on the other hand, is associated with negative emotions, such as fear, sadness or disgust.

Negative stress sucks away your energy, holds you back, debilitates and harms you. When unchecked, it can be rampantly destructive, doubly depressing and downright dangerous.

Your challenge is in knowing how to manage stress productively — knowing what to look out for, how to foster the right kinds and amounts, and how to keep the wrong kinds in balance.

Stress and anger

Stress is the emotional tension you feel arising from the external pressures you experience every day.

You usually sense it physiologically — as a general feeling of irritation, perhaps a knot in the stomach, tension in the neck, a stronger heart rate and maybe even a rise in blood pressure.

You also sense it psychologically — as a general state of angst, an emotional uneasiness that, when left unchecked, can grow to bring significant, negative consequences.

Anger is one of those extreme consequences, where just one seemingly “small straw” can indeed “break the camel’s back”.

It happens when you feel that others have caused you some harm or displeasure. When in anger, you

typically lash out.

Your behaviours cause harm to those that you feel have harmed you in some way.

Psychologically, emotions compromise your intentions.

Emotional thunderstorm

Stress and anger are rather like a powerful, tropical thunderstorm.

From a clear and calm morning, temperatures rise as the day progresses. Things get hotter, and the storm clouds loom and gather over the horizon.

The storm builds up to a point of utter inevitability. With a loud thunderclap, the full power and force of its might is unleashed — the deluge begins!

Anger is like that raging storm.

Once in anger, your ability to think rationally is severely impacted; you just need to let your anger blow out, as you need to let a storm blow over.

Psychology tells us that we are most productive before we reach that fully blown angered stage.

Once we have reached that tipping point, our performance and productivity become severely impaired.

Managing anger

The trick then for improved productivity is to catch those stresses, strains and emotions as they build — and you already know the early warning signals, don’t you?

You begin to feel those storm clouds gathering each time your customers complain, your suppliers deliver the wrong goods or your boss gives you another ridiculous deadline.

Each new event triggers more tension, and the inevitable outcome is an outburst of anger.

Yet, it does not need to be like that. You can start to change the pattern and break those old habits.

Stopping the anger from managing you means taking charge and making choices, just like what you would do on a thundery day — going for an appointment earlier, postponing it until later or choosing to do something different.

Tomorrow: A three-pronged approach to anger management

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