

Mental Health @ Work: Pressure & Stress



Modern workplace 'mental health' issues have moved beyond just being stressed. The Covid situation has basically brought to the forefront the emotional challenges people have been experiencing with Work and Life and which has been increasing long before Covid arrived.

Our automatic inherent self-preservation first line of defence mechanism i.e. the “Fight or Flight (or Freeze) Syndrome” always works perfectly.

This *primal* and evolutionary process is designed to mobilise and energise the body to “Fight” or “Runaway” and survive in the face of a threat.

Either way we need energy to do that, and that requires our main muscles - Thighs, Shoulder and Arms, to be mobilised by increasing and re-directing blood flow to them. This happens instantly – it's the way we are designed

The Sabre-Toothed Tiger

Those predators from a bygone era, have been replaced by the bully, the work-loads, insufficient time, coercive 'Motivation', fear of loss (money, house, respect, relationship...), humiliation, loneliness, embarrassment, overwhelm and of course failure.

Any time a 'stressful' situation presents itself at work or when working at home, we can't just run away and hide until the stressor has gone elsewhere, because it is work related and there are work related consequences due to whatever is causing the stress.

Being directly associated with and affected by a work stressor, we have to face it and we can't physically use our muscles which are now primed to fight or run. Consequently, it now has become personal.



Now most of us know that some stress is ok, it can be stimulating and spur people into action, as long as it is not prolonged and/or ongoing, in which case it then becomes destructive and creates dysfunction in the physical body including the brain which is the 'centre' of thinking capability.

We have to think through the problem

Thinking is non-physical, but clarity of thought requires the physical body to be functioning in a certain way (calmer, balanced, at ease or even positively excited - which it isn't when stressed, because it's primed for survival).

When the body is primed to fight or run, the bio-chemical changes can inhibit thinking because fear & survival require focusing on the threat and somehow stay alive.

We are designed to try and understand threats so we can avoid them. Thinking, naturally goes into greater detail when negative situations (threats) occur due to sensorial arousal – we take in more information about what’s happening or what has happened – It’s why in most cases a person will go on and on in great detail, in efforts to help you understand what is or has happened.



So ongoing pressure and stress, often fills people’s minds with more negative outcomes (and we can be very creative in that area) and so thinking becomes a stumbling block and a bit of a cycle: stress – consequences – worry – more stress – consequences – worry ... etc. Their negative and fear-based feelings drive the natural tendency to avoid as they worry more and focus on the consequences as opposed to resolving the problem.

This is made worse if they feel they have no authority or ability to solve the problem themselves and believe they can’t for some reason.

This is where health begins to be compromised as the body’s organs have changed the way they function and produce and process our bio chemistry.

Consequently, the body’s delicate balancing act is disrupted and over time produces illness in some form resulting in a multitude of symptoms.

Therefore, understanding what the workforce is experiencing, not so much what they may be complaining about, although that is important, paves the way for focused assistance or interventions in helping to strengthen emotional wellbeing.

There will always be work to do, deadlines, resource problems and people’s behavioural issues to contend with, so for our next part-2, we’ll look at approaches to assisting in this area.

Back Soon.

Des Allen