



Dr Mark Slaski

ConsultingTools Chief Psychologist

As a chartered organisational psychologist, Mark has over 15 years experience studying and applying the concepts of human psychology and emotional intelligence at work. His approach blends rigorous academic research with effective real-world practise.

As a senior lecturer in the psychology department at the University of Hertfordshire Mark teaches on the Masters programme as well as undertaking research in Organisational Psychology. Mark has presented research findings at a number of conferences and published a number of articles.

Mark is one of only 2 UK based members of the EI Consortium a unique body of international researchers dedicated to the research and application of Emotional Intelligence in organisations.

Stress - Still High on the Agenda?

I have visited several conferences recently as I do throughout the year. I was struck by the number of Occupational Health Providers and Stress Consultants exhibiting. In subsequent conversations, consultants reported attending these events has generated a lot of business. One can only assume stress is still a growing concern for UK organisations. There is plenty of evidence of this from such organisations as the HSE and CBI, and stress seems to affect all sectors at all levels.

Costs of Stress

Stress is something experienced by individuals, but it has a major impact on both organisations and society as a whole. Following the first signs of stress companies can soon fall into a 'stress spiral'. Stress leads to sickness absence, which in turn puts pressure on other employees to cover their work. Consequent job overload can lead to increased errors, accidents and wastage and puts extra strain on working relationships. This increases stress, reduces job satisfaction and commitment and increases employees intention to leave. Companies become less able to attract talent, and selection and training budgets soar. In addition, costs of stress are increased by legal costs, salaries whilst off sick, settlements, pensions top-up, counselling fees, and medical reports. One retail organisation calculated a cost in excess of £400,000 for a single store-manager who took early exit due to stress!

Identifying stress

Of course not all stress comes from the workplace, and whilst there are many things organisations can do to minimise stress, ultimately individuals need to share responsibility. One of the problems with stress is that it can be a slow-burn, it creeps up and before you know it the accumulation of pressure manifests itself in anxiety and depression, physical illness and behavioural change. Below are some of the signs to look for:

- Increased irritability
- Anxiousness
- Indecisiveness
- Anger

- Tiredness & low energy
- Poor productivity
- Lack of motivation
- Poor sleep
- Reduced sense of humour
- Headaches
- Increase in alcohol
- Increase in smoking
- Frequent illnesses
- Skin disorders
- Frequent bouts of sadness

A new idea – Wellbeing Circles?

We know that some of the best stress preventions are around health, habits and lifestyle choices. Research shows those who experience less stress tend to: 1) take regular exercise & relaxation; 2) have a healthy diet; 3) maintain a positive attitude; and, 4) enjoy supporting relationships. Wellbeing circles are a great way in which organisations can support individuals in preventing stress. The idea is that the 'circle' comprises of staff volunteers, probably 8-10 in number. They meet on a regular basis during work time with the aim of 'improving the workplace and wellbeing for all staff'. Guided in the first place by a stress expert the group generate ideas that can be implemented within the workplace. They set out strategies and define measurable targets. They can use **StressScan** to benchmark and norm. Momentum is achieved by capturing the combined energy and mutual support of the group. Success is often achieved because initiatives are driven from the bottom-up and championed by senior staff. Furthermore, systems are introduced that recognise, reinforce and reward positive behaviours.

A range of activities and ideas have included: charity weight-loss, running clubs, lunch-hour relaxation, meditation or yoga classes, canteen menu design for healthy food, smoking cessation support, hobby groups. One organisation bought bicycles for staff to use for exercise at lunchtime. Experienced wellbeing circles can also lobby senior management for change in policies, processes and procedures. Often for a relatively small expenditure companies can save a lot of money and misery in the long-term.