

The Cost of Stress on Women, Employees, and Businesses

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Take a deep breath and come with me on a journey to explore an area that impacts us all - physically, socially, personally, spirituality, and emotionally. Stress affects us in the form of head aches, sleeping problems, indigestion, depression, apathy and irritability, to mention just a few.

*Women respond to stress differently than men according to the article *Women and Stress*, by Nancy Stockwell, L.C.S.W. The glorious rewards of friendships are the key, and to have each other to help combat the negative symptoms of stress. According to Laura Cousino Klein, Ph.D., "When the hormone oxytocin is released as part of the stress response in women, it buffers the fight or flight response, and encourages women to tend children and gather with other women instead." Countless studies have shown that social ties reduce our risk of disease by lowering cholesterol, blood pressure, and heart rate. The famed Nurses' Health Study from Harvard concluded that not having close friends was as detrimental as smoking or excessive weight.*

*Employee stress costs organizations \$200-\$300 billion a year in the American workplace. According to David Lee's article, *Employee Stress*, "With research implicating stress in 60%-90% of medical problems, companies cannot afford to ignore the huge health-care expense employee stress creates." Stress is so costly that it impacts employee productivity, morale and well being. Absenteeism is a costly consequence, as is stress related workers compensation claims, that have skyrocketed, with job pressures blamed for 7 in 10 stress claims. Litigation is also rearing its ugly head, in the form of employee lawsuits. The increase in grievance filings and higher incidents of accidents can also be attributed to unchecked stress.*

On the business side, those companies that recognize stress as a mind/body/spirit disorder, that requires a multi-dimensional approach, will be on the cutting edge of the wellness movement. According to the Wellness Councils of America, "The United States spends more on health care than any other industrialized nation in the world and yet, in many respects, its citizens are not the healthiest...and in {one recent year}, health care costs in the U.S. totaled in excess of \$1 trillion." These statistics require a paradigm shift for us all that focuses on the pro-active side of employee health and wellness. The executives at Du Pont decided to invest in their human capital, and saw that each dollar invested in workplace health promotion yielded \$1.42 over two years in lower absenteeism costs.

A viable, common sense option would be a certain pro-active measure to prevent stress, which in the long run is more cost-effective, than its abrasive consequences. In our high tech world, we need high touch strategies, to address the physical symptoms that the above stress induces. Therapeutic massage in the form of 15 minute seated, clothed massage on a regular basis, is becoming a popular, affordable service. The increased use of computers, office work, and basic inactivity has resulted in OSHA labeling what is

becoming a huge risk in business - musculoskeletal disorders (M.S.D.'s). Addressing the areas of chronic or acute pain in the back, neck, arms and hands with professional massage therapy by certified massage therapists is a significant WIN/WIN for all. Investing in the most valuable asset in a company - THE EMPLOYEE is always money wisely spent. Take another really deep breath and commit yourself to a healthier workplace that you truly deserve.

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