

Seven Tips to Reduce Stress and Increase Collaboration in the Workplace

By Bonnie Artman Fox

All workplaces experience some degree of stress. Work may be demanding, deadlines loom and tempers sometimes flare. But it's not unusual for stress to have a long-term impact on productivity, turnover and profitability. As stress increases, people don't look forward to going to work and when they are there, they aren't really present or productive.

Yes, certain work conditions can trigger stress, but the fact is that stress starts with us. That is, our reactions to stressful situations make things only more stressful.

By taking responsibility for our stress we can actually make a difference in a work setting that tends to trigger stressful reactions.

Stress vs. Mindfulness

You might say that stress is an unconscious response to certain situations and circumstances. Mindfulness is a conscious response to the same external triggers.

Although we may try, we really can't change others. But what we can do is influence stressful situations by how we show-up as Leaders. We can start to practice mindfulness instead of reacting impatiently, getting overwhelmed or shutting down and avoid dealing with challenges altogether.

This article outlines seven key tips you can practice to reduce stress in your workplace. By following these tips you can change your mindset and influence those you work with at the same time. When stress is reduced and mindfulness expands you'll start to see more compassion, interest and even enthusiasm in your team.

Mindfulness Tips based on Research

These tips are based on Jon Kabat Zinn's seven principles of mindfulness developed at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.

All of the tips in this article are actually simple exercises that anyone can practice. The first aim of these exercises is to bring more awareness to the situation.

I recommend you read through this article and read all the tips and then come back to the first one and try practicing it for a day. Then practice the second tip for a day until you have gone through all of them.

1. Shifting from Judgment to Nonjudgment

We often don't realize how much judgment seeps into our thoughts. From the way people dress to their level of education. We often make negative judgments based on our perceptions, and not on people's capabilities. Even as we become aware of this tendency, it's hard not to be judgmental.

But how can we interact with another human being effectively when we are being judgmental? Just think how you feel when you are being judged! All it does is make you resistant and resentful. And judgmental attitudes and behaviors will only lead to more stress and lower productivity.

Tip #1 – Practice noticing the tendency to label or categorize people or events.

How Non-judging can reduce stress: The act of judging automatically increases stress. The thing that you'll gain from this first tip is just by increasing your awareness of being judgmental you'll find yourself judging less. You'll start seeing others in a different light and will be more open to them without even trying.

2. Shifting from Assumptions to Curiosity

Have you ever looked at a person and not really seen them? Or perhaps you have been part of a conversation, but you aren't really listening? You look like you are attentive, nodding your head or giving appropriate "um hums". You think you know what the person is saying because you've had the same conversation many times before, but you don't.

An attendee in one of my mindfulness classes shared that one day she looked at her husband and asked him when he shaved off his mustache, and he said "two months ago". Sometimes we only see through our own thoughts and perceptions, and we miss out.

Tip #2 – Practice approaching your staff with a curiosity as if you are seeing them or hearing about a problem they are facing for the first time.

How Curiosity can reduce stress: When we are curious, we are more likely to be creative and gain new understandings that spark innovation. It invites critical thinking that can invigorate your team to become more enthusiastic about their work.

3. Shifting from Auto-pilot to Non-striving

Have you ever driven from point A to point B and wonder how you got there? Your mind is wandering off either thinking about the past or anticipating the future, but not really paying attention to what you are doing, while you are doing it.

When we are non-striving we are allowing ourselves to be in the present moment, whether we are facing something uncomfortable in a relationship or even physical pain, we are staying with it. Society says, "Try harder, work longer hours, and keep your phone by your side at all times". This practice is allowing yourself to try less and "be" more.

Tip #3 – Practice staying in the present moment. When your thoughts drift to the past or the future (which they will, that's normal), just notice where your thoughts went and redirect your focus to what is before you.

How Non-striving can reduce stress. Most stress is driven by beliefs that one's worth is based on what we do. Non-striving reminds us that genuine success is *who* we are instead of *what* we do.

4. Shifting from Anguish to Acceptance

Do you have difficulty sleeping because of the problems you are facing at work? Perhaps your tendency is to minimize that the tension between staff members isn't really "that bad" and they just need to grow up and learn how to get along. After all, you are their boss, not their parent or therapist!

Seeing things as they actually are, especially when we play a part in what's happening can be uncomfortable. When we redirect our focus from the turmoil of wanting things to be

different to acceptance, a shift begins to happen. It doesn't mean we have to like what's happening and it certainly is not a resignation to do nothing; it is simply coming to terms with how things really are.

Tip #4 – Practice seeing a difficult situation for what it is and accepting this is how it is right now. Notice what happens within as you acknowledge this.

How Acceptance can reduce stress: Acceptance allows us to know what we are dealing with so we can develop a plan of action. It's been said "what we resist, persists". Acceptance helps us embrace reality in order to move on with dignity.

5. Shifting from holding on to letting go

Closely related to acceptance is letting go. It is human nature to want things to be a certain way, more accurately "our" way. If you notice that your mind has a constant chatter and you have difficulty relaxing or falling asleep at night, it is a classic sign of stress.

The practice of letting go is when we notice an attachment to how we want things to be, to release our expectations and accept things are they are. It is in the releasing that paradoxically we are able to receive, often times something far better than what we were holding onto.

Tip #5 – Practice noticing and letting go of thoughts, feelings, and situations that you tend to hold on to.

How Letting Go can reduce stress: Allowing yourself to loosen your grip to the comfort and familiarity of whatever you are holding onto, opens up the possibilities of what can be. And it might even improve your sleep!

6. Shifting from doubt to trust

Learning to trust oneself can be difficult if you are used to being in busy mode and you are not used to paying attention to the promptings from your intuition. Research shows that the neural circuitry in the body gives us clues through either a gut reaction or other bodily sensation that something isn't right.

As a Marriage & Family Therapist, many times my clients told me that either before an affair was disclosed or proof that their child was using drugs, they knew something was wrong. They just didn't know what it was.

Tip #6 – Practicing noticing and trusting the inner promptings you receive from within...the sense that something is off.

How Trust can reduce stress. By developing trust in yourself you are more likely to make conscious, well thought out choices instead of reacting out of impulse.

7. Shifting from Impatience to Patience

All of the practices we've discussed thus far rest on the practice of patience. Allowing people, circumstances, and outcomes to unfold in their own time is difficult, especially if you have knowledge of how something could be harmful.

However, if people or events are forced to be a certain way, the growth is halted. The analogy of the transformation of the moth to the butterfly from inside the chrysalis is a beautiful example of allowing things to emerge in their own time.

Tip #7 – Practice patience in allowing a difficult employee to learn through a natural consequence.

How Patience can reduce stress: Patience invites slowing down and being present to your life. The benefits are decreased blood pressure, relaxation, improved relationships, and just feeling better!

Integrating These Tips

We recognize these tips are easier said than done. In order to receive the most impact, it is most beneficial if you integrate the practices as a daily part of your life.

By bringing more awareness into the moments of your day, you will be more likely to manage stress better, be more focused, and an influential leader. Over time, the ripple effect is a team that collaborates which improves productivity and the organization's bottom line. That's something to be awake for!

About Bonnie Artman Fox



Bonnie Artman Fox is a Mindfulness Trainer and Coach. She has also been a Marriage & Family Therapist and Nurse. She specializes in helping Corporate Leaders bring their presence, awareness and compassion to build a positive work culture.

Contact her at Bonnie@AConscious.com or 412.877.8331 to discuss how your organization could benefit from training and coaching for more focus and less stress.

Bonnie offers a complimentary "Mindfulness Strategy Session" to discuss your organization's situation, goals and challenges in this area.

You can visit her website at www.AConscious.com



PROGRAMS TO BUILD COLLABORATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

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