

# The Successful SUPERVISOR

2012

January

Tips from  LifeSolutions

**Welcome to 2012!** For many of us, starting the new year will include “New Year’s Resolutions.” These resolutions (whether we keep them or not) are generally well-intentioned and focused on moving our lives in a healthier, happier direction. If you are at a loss for ideas this year, allow us to recommend stress management. Managers and supervisors often find that high levels of stress are inherent in their jobs. It almost feels like part of the job description! Middle level managers and supervisors, in particular, struggle with the quandary of “high-performance expectations with little major decision making authority.” This can lead to a sense of not being in control. Perceived lack of control is a key contributor to stress. Since this is just part of “how it is” and not likely to change any time soon, managers and supervisors need to develop their own personal coping skills. The next three issues of *The Successful Supervisor* will focus on stress management. Material is adapted from *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, Dell Publishing, 1990. As always, we are interested in your feedback and/or questions. Please e-mail EAP at [ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com](mailto:ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com) or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

**Debra Messer, MA, CEAP, LifeSolutions**

Most workplaces are breeding grounds for stress and most jobs are potentially stressful in a variety of ways. As noted above, however, managers sometimes find themselves on the horns of a dilemma ... they are expected to “manage” staff and productivity while having little input into decisions and policies that impact their work unit and their employees. This can contribute to an uneasy sense of authority and control and can lead to feelings of stress and anxiety. Even if you have the best job in the world with great support and lots of latitude for decision making, you still don’t have complete “control” over what goes on in your work unit. Your best laid plans fall apart, things continually change, people or events disrupt your work or challenge your role, and the *people* ... “Oh, if only I didn’t have to deal with the people!”

**So, what *can* I do to cope more effectively with stress? You’re right ... it isn’t going away.**

The most important thing to remember is that **the degree of stress you experience depends primarily on how you interpret the events occurring during your day.** What is your perspective and what meaning do you attach to an event or interaction? Do you struggle with the ever present changes and disruptions and end up worried or upset? Or do you “go with the flow,” expect change and impermanence, and allow yourself to ride the current rather than battling to swim upstream?

## Tips for Riding the Current:

- ◆ **Keep things in perspective.** While we often eagerly await the weekend or bemoan the fact that we can’t just quit or retire, Kabat-Zinn points out that we sometimes forget that it is often our work that adds meaning and coherence to our lives. How much meaning and coherence will depend on how much we care about our job and believe in what we are doing.
- ◆ **Ask yourself,** “What is my job, what does it mean to me, and how can I best do it given the circumstances I find myself in?”
- ◆ **Shift your internal dialogue** from “I *have* to be here ... I don’t have a choice,” to “I am *choosing* to do this job (even if only for economic reasons).” Remember, the more control you feel you have, the less stress you will experience. When you get up in the morning, take a few minutes to remind yourself that you are *choosing* to go to work today. Think about what is on your agenda and remind yourself that it may not turn out as you have planned.
- ◆ **Expect change, challenges, and stress.** Much of our suffering comes from fighting against or being upset about “what is.” We say to ourselves, “This isn’t fair, it shouldn’t be happening this way, I don’t like this” ... and so on. And yet it is happening! This doesn’t mean we can’t take steps to change a situation. It means that it is an exhausting waste of energy to rail against reality.
- ◆ **Reframe stressful events.** Obstacles can be seen as challenges. Difficult or frustrating staff can be viewed as an opportunity to practice and develop your

people skills or the qualities of patience and compassion. Tough conversations can become your chance to strengthen your ability to be assertive or to set boundaries.

- ◆ **Be aware of your body and monitor your sensations throughout the workday.** Are you feeling tension anywhere in your body? Where? How are you sitting or standing? What is your facial expression? What is your body language saying? Take several deep breaths in and out and release as much tension as you can. Consciously change your posture or facial expression to reflect calmness, dignity, and alertness.
- ◆ **Use any breaks you get to truly relax.** Instead of going to the snack machine or smoking, take a short walk outside, do neck and shoulder rolls at your desk, or find a place where you can sit quietly for 5 minutes and breathe.
- ◆ **Use cues in your environment** (phone ringing, waiting at the copier, etc.) as reminders to breathe deeply and center yourself. Try to stop at least once every hour and become aware of your breathing.
- ◆ **Pay attention** to your communications with others in the workplace. Are you happy with your interactions with others? Can you be more sensitive? Can you approach people differently?
- ◆ **When you go home,** immediately change out of your work clothes and shoes. Allow yourself to transition into your non-work role. If possible, give yourself a few minutes of quiet to unwind before starting your evening.

Remember, you can manage stress ... it does not have to manage you.

**Next month we will talk about People Stress. Call LifeSolutions if you would like to learn more about stress management or would like support in developing your resources for coping with stress.**

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