



AskTheInternetTherapist.com
Newsletter September 2004

Featured Article
Career Counseling
Increased Stress Due to Job Insecurity
By Carole Saylor, MC, NCC, LAC, DCC, LISAC

In today's world, we are more and more defined, not by who we are, but by what work we do. Work plays a powerful and increasing role in people's lives. As it makes more and more demands on our time and energy, our chosen work or career path impacts every facet of our lives. A strong relationship develops between our work and our mental and physical health. Stress in any of these areas, especially work, will affect all other areas of our lives and this is when career counseling can be helpful.

Stress is an interaction between individuals and any source of demand (stressor) within their environment. A stressor is the object or event that the individual perceives to be disruptive. Stress results from the perception that the demands exceed one's capacity to cope. Different people react differently to the same stressors because of their backgrounds, experiences and values. Elevated stress levels in employees are associated with increased turnover, absenteeism; sickness, reduced productivity, and low morale.

Work stressors are related to depression, anxiety, general mental distress, heart disease, ulcers, and chronic pain. Many people are distressed by efforts to juggle work and family demands, such as caring for sick or aging parents or children. Any exploration of the relationship between work conditions and mental distress, which is the hallmark of career counseling, must take into account individual factors such as sex, age, race, income, education, marital and parental status, personality, and ways of coping.

Although the rewards of work can offset some of its stressful aspects, the physical environment and the psychosocial conditions of employment can have adverse effects on a worker's mental and physical well-being. Lack of control over work, the work place, and employment status have been identified both as sources of stress and as a critical health risk for some workers. Employees who are unable to exert control over their lives at work are more likely to experience work stress and are therefore more likely to have impaired health. Many studies have found that heavy job demand, and low control, or decreased decision latitude, lead to job dissatisfaction, mental strain, and cardiovascular disease.

Today, stress and its resulting illnesses impact workers in almost every corner of the world. In Australia, stress claims by government workers increased by 90% between 1990 and 1993. A French survey showed 64% of nurses and 61% of teachers were upset over the stresses associated with their jobs. Another study found that stress-related diseases such as high blood pressure and heart attacks cost the U.S. economy \$200 billion a year in absenteeism, compensation claims and medical expenses.

In today's economic upheavals caused by downsizing, layoffs, mergers, and bankruptcies have cost hundreds of thousands of workers their jobs. Millions more have been shifted to unfamiliar tasks within their companies and wonder how much longer they will be employed. Adding to the pressures that workers face are new bosses, computer surveillance of production, fewer health and retirement benefits, and the feeling they have to work longer and harder just to maintain their current economic status. Workers at every level are experiencing increased tension and uncertainty, and are updating their resumes, hoping to find jobs, that in many cases, no longer exist.

The loss of a job can be devastating, putting unemployed workers at risk for physical illness, marital strain, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Loss of a job affects every part of life, from what time you get up in the morning, to whom you see, and what you can afford to do socially. Until the transition is made to a new position, stress is chronic.

In many instances it has been found that the restructuring, reengineering, layoffs, outsourcing, and offshoring performed by companies did little to improve productivity and nothing to improve morale. A review of 52 studies of corporate restructuring involving several thousand companies found that on an average, organizational downsizing had little if any positive impact on earnings or stock market performance. And regrettably, 70% of U.S. companies report serious morale problems caused by years of upheaval and restructuring.

Workers who survive corporate downsizing also find their lives impacted by the vast changes sweeping their work environments. The Lancet, a British medical journal, recently reported increased illness among employees who survive job reductions. Mark Braverman, the founder of Crisis Management Group in Newton, Massachusetts, states "Often times, the people who remain after the cuts are made, wind up feeling demoralized, overworked, stressed, and fearful that they will be targeted the next time around."

A feeling of powerlessness is a universal cause of job stress. When you feel powerless, you're prey to depression's traveling companions, helplessness and hopelessness. You feel you cannot alter or avoid the situation because you feel nothing can be done.

Many employees find themselves worrying about survival rather than a new car or new home. People's dreams are fading fast with the reality that they could be jobless at any time in today's workplace. What was once taken for granted now leads to worry and insecurity. Troubling thoughts flood some people's minds such as: the loss of their home, retirement, pensions, and health benefits, leading to greater insecurity.

Workers are struggling to adjust to downsizing. In a poll conducted in 1995, workers said they would work more hours, take fewer vacations, or accept lesser benefits in order to keep their jobs. Desperate for some job security, people are willing to work harder and longer with fewer benefits to maintain their occupational status.

Loss of control over one's future work role can lead to mental health issues along with devastating consequences to other life roles including family life, friends, and societal relationships. It can also lower self-esteem, which often leads to depression. This loss of job control can have devastating effects on every aspect of not only the individual but of their family's lives.

In general, job control is the ability to exert influence over one's environment so that the environment becomes more rewarding and less threatening. Individuals who have job control have the ability to influence the planning and execution of work tasks. Research has found that it is the influence resulting from participation, rather than participation itself, which affects job stress and health.

The following strategies for reducing work-related stress may assist you in gaining a feeling of job control.

1. Alter the working conditions so that they are less stressful or more conducive to effective coping. This strategy is most appropriate for large numbers of workers working under severe conditions. Examples include altering physical annoyances such as noise levels, or changing organizational decision-making processes to include employees. These alterations could be attempted by large numbers of employees working together such as a labor or union group. It could also be addressed by upper management in corporations who truly have a regard for their employees.
2. Help individuals adapt by teaching them better coping strategies for conditions that are impossible or difficult to change. A limitation to this strategy is that it is costly to deal with each individual's unique transaction with the environment. Intervention strategies could include individual counseling services for employees, Employee Assistance Programs, or specialized stress management programs, such as cognitive behavioral interventions (Long, 1988). Many Employee Assistance Programs address these issues within the company, however, some employees are reluctant to participate for fear of being labeled as trouble makers or have their names appear at the top of the next layoff list. If an individual is feeling inordinate stress at work, it would be advised to seek counseling on an individual basis or find stress reduction classes outside the corporate environment.
3. Identify the stressful relationship between the individual or group and the work setting. Intervention strategies might include changes in worker assignment to produce a better person-environment fit, or it could involve teaching coping strategies for individuals who share common coping deficits (e.g., training in relaxation skills). Again these interventions would require support from upper management in the Company. Or an individual would have to pursue learning coping strategies on their own time and at their own expense in order to insure confidentiality.
4. A good tactic to make you feel you are in control and being proactive about the situation is to re-evaluate what is truly important in your life. Decide what status level, economic level, and comfort level you have to maintain to be able to survive and be happy within yourself. When people do this evaluation, they frequently discover they can make much less money and live much differently than they do currently and still be happy. Take a

look at other careers where you might be as happy or happier and pursue the education or training necessary to work in that field. It would be advisable to obtain this training while you are still employed at your old job, before looking for a new job becomes imperative.

Conclusion:

Work stress is constantly affecting us and our families and seems to be growing in leaps and bounds. This stress can be the harbinger of job dissatisfaction, mental strain, and physical maladies. If you find yourself experiencing increased levels of job stress due to job insecurity, you need to take action and prepare for the future. You must be your own safety net, you cannot depend on your company to have your best interests at heart. You cannot be an ostrich with your head stuck in the sand. You need to see the handwriting on the wall and prepare accordingly, especially if that handwriting is saying you will probably be unemployed within a few years.

Carole M. Saylor, MC, NCC, LAC, DCC, LISAC

Featured Therapist
Carole M. Saylor, MC, NCC, LAC, DCC, LISAC
Substance Abuse Online Counseling



Carole is a Licensed Independent Substance Abuse Counselor in the state of Arizona (LISAC), a Licensed Associate Counselor in the state of Arizona (LAC), a Nationally Certified Counselor (NCC) and a Distance Credentialed Counselor (DCC), as well as a member of the American Counseling Association (ACA), National Board of Certified Counselors, International Society for Mental Health Online (ISMHO), and a Member at Large on the board of the Arizona Counseling Association (AzCA). She is a graduate of the University of Phoenix with a Bachelors degree in Business Management. She also received her Masters in Counseling from the University of Phoenix in Tempe, Arizona.

Carole resides in Peoria, Arizona, and specializes in issues related to drug and alcohol abuse, which frequently include issues of work-related stress, alternate lifestyles, aging issues, caregiver issues, suicide survivors, grief and loss, and divorce facilitation. Since the work people do greatly affects their lives and those of their families, Carole's previous extensive experience in the business world and corporate America aids in building a rapport with her clients that might otherwise be missing in the counseling process. She brings with her a wide range of life experiences and empathic listening skills that appeal to her clients.

Carole enjoys computers, reading, painting, sewing, and woodworking. Her favorite reads are psychology, hypnosis, science fiction, and mysteries. She is available for General Counseling via email or face to face counseling weekdays or Monday and Wednesday evenings.

She thoroughly believes that each life is a path winding toward perfection. But sometimes we need help along the way.

[Visit Carole Saylor's Page!!](#)
Email Carole at carole@asktheinternettherapist.com

September Contest Winner

Congratulations to Benny D. He is our September 2004 winner and he picked the Sleep-Beach Tape. Enjoy Benny.

Featured Product Choosing Health by Dr. Mark Force



Dr. Mark Force, an eminent chiropractor, acupuncturist, and nutritionist, has written a definitive guide to health, "Choosing Health". Not only is this guide knowledgeable and complete but is meant to be a self-help guide to health. Dr. Force believes strongly that the general public has the knowledge to be and the desire to be a partner in their own medical health.

Special Announcements

Please take a few moments to take a short survey to help us better our website. It is completely anonymous. Just follow this link: http://www.asktheinternettherapist.com/online_survey.asp and answer the questions. Thank you very much for your valuable time and cooperation.

As you have already seen, all of our videos are digitally re-mastered and are available on VHS and DVD. Although we still have some of the old videos, which we are selling for \$25.00 each to make room for more of the new, digitally re-mastered ones. They are available at the price above only by calling 1-800-881-7693 and placing an order over the phone. **We have just a few left!! Hurry before this offer expires** (This offer is available only for the Love Addiction, Communication Assertiveness, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Chemical Dependence, Co-dependence, and Dysfunctional Families videos).

Be sure to utilize our **free** discussion boards. These forums are formatted by the following special topics- Hypnosis, Chemical Dependence, Co-Dependence, Parenting, Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder, Medical Issues, Dysfunctional Families, Attention Deficit Disorder, Relationships, Veterinary Concerns, and Depression. You might find useful information in the various topics. These forums are usually monitored by our clinicians in a weekly basis.

As you are probably aware asktheinternettherapist offers online individual paid appointment times for in depth assistance with any of our professionals. Our discussion groups however are

visited from time to time by our staff and their comments to discussions or questions are provided free of charge. This is an added benefit in addition to client self-help that makes up the bulk of the discussion group traffic. Visit soon.

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*We believe better health
begins with better Mental Health.*
Jef Gazley M.S.
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