

ARTICLE: COPING WITH LIFE'S ANXIETIES

Who today isn't struggling at some level with life's anxieties? Some of the causes are family issues, health issues, financial concerns, work environment or a combination of factors. While some people struggle to manage internal emotions; others may have learned how to regulate their feelings. In either case improving the way we cope with life's anxieties is an important skill to master.

When a person is confronted by negative situations, the body releases hormones as a response to stress. Cortisol and adrenaline both produced by the adrenal gland are secreted into the blood stream. As a result, heart rates increase, blood vessels contract, air passages dilate and the body is now in the fight-or-flight response mode. Those hormones stay in the body for four hours. As each additional stress-inducing situation occurs – a difficult conversation, a negative email, or an order cancellation – more of these chemicals are added to our already stressed system. How might this impact performance? Let's consider a few examples to understand the impact of stress on workplace performance.

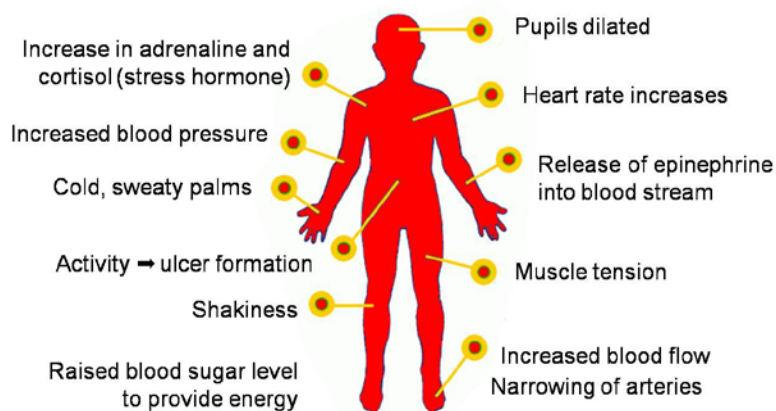


Diagram courtesy of EQmentor, Inc.

The impact of emotions on workplace performance

A manager may contribute to a negative work environment when under duress. He/she may speak to an employee in a curt manner causing the employee to get angry and de-motivated. Anxiety causes listening ability to decrease and bad things happen when communication breaks down. Replying to an email when upset might cause the reply to be written in an angry tone. In turn, the email gets distributed to who knows how many additional employees and some may react emotionally and reply to the email determined to set things straight. The writers of those emails are now distracted from what they should be doing. Bottom line: Performance is going down and it's costing the company time and money.

Understanding our feelings can help us to cope

To be able to respond in a more positive way as life's circumstances come at us, it is important to understand *WHAT* you are feeling and *WHY* you are feeling the way you do. In order to become more aware of your emotions, complete the following sentences:

Work:

- When I am getting ready for work I feel...
- While at work I feel...
- At the end of the work day I feel...

Family Life:

- With my spouse or partner I feel...
- With my children I feel...
- Around my parents I feel...

For Managers:

- When my employees interrupt me I feel...
- When my employees don't meet my expectations I feel...

Exercise courtesy of EQmentor, Inc.

If you are having trouble putting your feelings into words, review the following continuum: Angry - Upset - Sad - Calm - Indifferent - Bored - Happy - Excited

Next:

- Set a goal of how you would like to be feeling in one hour.
- How can you get from the present feeling (present state) to the goal (future state)?

Negative emotions drain energy. When we move to a positive state of mind we gain the energy to cope. As an example; think how hard it might be to respond kindly to your family members when you come home feeling exhausted from the stresses of work. The mind is where emotions are generated. Therefore, changing your thinking can change how you feel and how you communicate with others.

Since you are the only who can change your mind, wouldn't it be helpful to make the choice to learn about yourself (your feelings) and better cope with what life throws at you? The first step is to accept that you can't change others and that you may not be able to change anxiety-causing circumstances. The second step in coping with life's anxieties is to decide to do a better job managing your emotions, attitude and actions.

Notice the observation of William James the famous Harvard psychologist: "One of the greatest discoveries of my generation was that people were able to change their lives, by changing their *attitude of mind*."

About Jason Kleid: Jason is focused on optimizing performance and getting results. Underscoring this philosophy is a belief that it is always the individuals in any organization, where the greatest potential for improvement and possibility of change resides. It is the mind (one's thinking) where new ideas broaden understanding and cause things to happen. However, it is the heart (inner person/motivation) where transformation occurs.