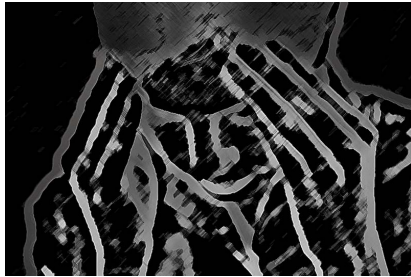


# STRESS, SAFETY & RETURN TO PROFIT

*Increasing personal and organisational resilience to stress will pay dividends in reducing risk and improving efficiency.* By Steve Garrett BSc, Ad.Dip.PC



If the levels and causes of work-related stress lay unexamined in your organisation then your business could be exposed to unacceptable risks – both safety related and financial. Improving organisational and personal resilience to stress can help avoid accidents, speed recovery and ensure maximum creative contribution from a workforce faced with a fast-changing business environment.

The good news for employers *and* employees is that the skills required for combatting stress in the workplace are the exact same skills required to improve professional qualities: The pay-off is clear. Reduce stress and you reduce:

## Skills that Combat Stress:

- assertiveness
- clear communication
- decision-making
- delegation
- emotional intelligence
- time management
- organisational skills
- leadership
- teamwork
- ability to prioritise *and then* focus on those priorities.

losses due to accidents, staff turnover rates, sick pay, agency staff, additional recruitment and training; and you improve workplace relationships, direction, creativity, performance and quality.

There has been great progress made in protecting workers, and the public, whether it is from fire, chemicals, smoke, machinery or the environment. The major risk factors have been identified and reduced by: implementing effective procedures, new technology, ensuring adequate supervision and providing appropriate training. All risk has an associated human factor, and the residual risk, as demonstrated by recent disasters, confirms that an individual's stress response when faced with uncertainty can create or

prevent an accident. Who are the workers most likely to contribute to, or cause, an accident? Those unable to cope with their stress!

**Stress is a state, which is accompanied by physical, psychological or social complaints or dysfunctions and which results from individuals feeling unable to bridge a gap with the requirements or expectations placed on them.**

People feel stressed, when they do not have adequate resources to complete their work. The judgement of whether resources are inadequate is personal and often subjective (22% of workers report stress as a symptom). The stress response, being psycho-physiological, reinforces that personal experience of stress is more important than theory. Two equally capable, trained and resourced people can respond completely differently in the same situation. The first may become positively enthused and perform extraordinarily well, focused and effective ("in the zone"); the second may become overwhelmed and

## Resources that reduce Stress:

- time
- knowledge
- skills
- rules and procedures
- specific goals
- leadership
- support
- supervision and management
- autonomy
- a personal voice!

perform poorly, perhaps dangerously. The residual consequences to the business can be long-term and will reflect these positive and negative qualities of motivation. Would you be happy with a supplier whose components didn't perform as expected in over 20% of occasions?

The other most common symptoms for work-related illness – backache, muscular pain, fatigue, headaches, irritability and anxiety – are all symptoms of stress, and in turn, each of these symptoms can cause stress. The fact that many employees take leave for colds, flu and headaches etc. may not be “one of those things” we have to accept, it could be that there are high levels of stress amongst the workforce. Certainly the body's stress-reaction involves suppression of the immune system, so infections and illnesses are more likely, and recovery will take longer, often leading to reoccurrences if the root cause is not dealt with. The majority of sick workers actually report 6 or more symptoms!

Work-related stress knocks 4% off EU GDP annually and nearly two-thirds of all lost working days recorded are as a consequence of work-related stress. It pays to be interested, and it is not about apportioning blame: we are all vulnerable, but we just have different thresholds. That's why any stress management system needs to include individual as well as collective measures to combat stress. Weaving a stress management system into your safety management system and team/crew resource management training can be easily done and positive results quickly achieved.

Stress is insidious we are often unaware that our stress levels have increased dangerously until it is too late and we become ill, lose support, or have an accident. That is why raising awareness and providing stress management tools is essential. Tackling work-related stress is an effective way of improving professional capabilities throughout your organisation and will help reduce losses and risks now, and accelerate your business' return to profit when the economy improves.

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Through aim2 Ltd (registered in England and Wales 5856062) Steve Garrett provides stress, anger and personal development training as well as individual coaching and therapy. Steve is a psychotherapist, SMS trainer and coach with over 25 years experience in aviation. To find out more visit [www.aim2.eu](http://www.aim2.eu)

This is the first of 6 stress-related articles to be released early 2012. Contact Steve to obtain “Word” versions to allow editing for your internal publications and intranet.

1. Stress, Safety & Return to Profit
2. Stress Regulatory Framework
3. Stress Management Systems
4. A Biopsy of Stress
5. Stress Toolbox for Managers
6. Stressing the Personal Responsibility