***Chapter 10 - MANAGING YOUR STRESS***

**Chapter 10** addresses stress in the customer service environment. Research on what causes stress in the workplace, how to recognize the signs of stress, and strategies for effectively reducing it are explored. Additionally, the topic of workplace violence is examined along with tips for recognizing telltale signs that someone might be prone to violence and how to prevent it.

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# *Instructional Suggestions*

In this chapter, students will have an opportunity to identify a variety of factors that create stress along with strategies for helping to reduce or eliminate them.

As you go through the chapter material, share personal experiences, offer your own suggestions and solicit input from students.

Some options for enhancing the material in the chapter include:

* Locate a stress survey that students can take to identify their own levels of stress. Many of the web sites under the heading of “Stress” offer these.
* Have a doctor or other professional who deals with workplace stress come in to discuss the topic with your class.
* Locate books on stress that contain relaxation/visioning activities and have students participate in one. This will give them another tool for personal stress education.

# *Lesson Notes*

**Instructor Note 10-1**: Show ***PowerPoint 10.1 – Managing Your Stress***

The following are suggested instructional approaches related to **Chapter 10 – Managing Your Stress** that you could use to facilitate the class.

*QUOTE*

You may want to draw attention to the quote and ask for reactions to it.

**Instructor Note 10-2:** Show ***PowerPoint 10.2 – Lesson Objectives*** and briefly discuss how you will address each objective throughout the chapter (*e.g.* strategies, support materials, activities). Also, discuss any other chapter content-related information necessary.

***Learning Objectives***

At the end of this chapter, and when applying the information within, you will be able to:

* Identify leading causes of stress in the customer service environment
* Examine personal stressors
* Recognize potentially stressful situations

# Avoid stressful situations

* Develop techniques for reducing stress

***Quick ✓ Preview***

**Instructor Note 10-3:** Have students complete the Quick ✓ Preview quiz, then go over their answers and tie into the chapter content. Tie them into chapter content and any other items related to what you will cover in the class.

**Quick Preview Answers:**

1. True

2. False

3. True

4. True

5. True

6. True

7. False

8. False

9. True

10. False

11. False

12. True

***STRESS RESEARCH***

**Instructor Note 10-4:** Spend some time going through the research section, using ***PowerPoint 10.3 – The Impact of Stress***, ***Figures 10.1 - The Impact of Stress*** and ***Figure 10.2 –What Workers Say About Stress on the Job,*** to raise awareness of the serious threat that stress creates in the workplace.

Stress is a major contributor to loss of workplace efficiency. Each year, millions of dollars and countless worker hours of productivity are lost due to stress-related illnesses.

No matter which stress-related statistics you use, customer service is typically rated among the top most stressful occupations. As a matter of fact, many studies have consistently listed customer service in the top ten most stressful occupations in the country. That is because of the variety of different people and situations you face on any given day that require a multitude of skills, quick thinking, and reactions. According to the American Institute of Stress, customer service representatives ranked fourth behind traffic controllers, inner-city high school teachers, and police officers as having the most stressful job in the country. Additional studies, conducted by Yale University ranked customer service as the eighth most stressful occupation.

The results of pressures that people are facing in the workplace have been staggering, financially and from a health standpoint (see ***Figure 10.1 - The Impact of Stress***).

Obviously, this fact can be a challenge for you and the other professionals in the field, especially if you aren't prepared to handle the pressures.

***WHAT IS JOB STRESS?***

**Instructor Note 10-5:** Lead a group brainstorming session with the class to define what stress is. Flip chart or write student responses on a dry erase or blackboard. After you have listed student responses, briefly point out that stress is different for each person. What some people find stressful, others do not, while some factors are shared.

If you would like, also ask and flip chart responses to the following question: What mental and emotional qualities should a person in the customer service profession possess to be successful?

Use ***PowerPoint 10.4 – What is Stress?*** after students have created their own definitions. Tie into any matching elements of this definition to what they identified. This definition comes from the Center for Disease Control’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Job stress is defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of a job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker.”

Bad stress, or *distress,* is the type that causes problems in dealing with customers and other people, reduces your effectiveness, dampens your motivation, makes your life miserable, and can lead to long-term mental and physical problems or death. While some of the stress that you encounter in the workplace can be eliminated, some cannot; you simply have to work to minimize it as much as possible. There are strategies and techniques throughout this chapter to assist in doing that.

It may help to learn that you are not alone in feeling stressed on the job. Many workers today believe that their jobs are stressful

**Instructor Note 10-6:** Show ***PowerPoint 10.5 - Eustress***

Not all stress is bad. Dr. Hans Selye, a prominent psychologist, coined the term eustress a number of years ago to describe “good” stress. An example of eustress would be a deadline or goal that you set for yourself that makes you feel good about yourself (*e.g.* running three miles in under twenty minutes, graduating from high school or college, delivering a successful presentation to clients). In each of these examples, there may also be negative stress along the way because of the tasks required to achieve your ultimate objective (*e.g.* the physical conditioning necessary to strengthen your body to run faster, staying up all night to study for an examination, or spending hours researching and rehearsing a presentation). With eustress, you may go through the same physiological stages that you would for negative situations, but the end result is a feeling of accomplishment and exhilaration when you reach your goal.

***WHAT CREATES STRESS?***

**Instructor Note 10-7:** Refer to page 273 of the text—What Creates Stress? to overview the categories of factors present in the workplace that can lead to stress. Refer to ***Figure 10.3 – “Hassles” by Age”*** and ***Figure 10.4 – Hassles by Sex and Race/Ethnicity*** and ***PowerPoint 10.6 - “Hassles” by Age”*** and ***PowerPoint 10.7 - Hassles by Sex and Race/Ethnicity***

**ASK:**

**What types of products or services can you think of that are provided very quickly today but in the past took hours, days, or weeks? How do you think this “get it now” attitude is affecting service delivery, personnel, and organizations?**

Tie their responses into escalating levels of stress in the customer service environment.

In a word, LIFE creates stress. The world moves at a much faster pace than it did decades ago. The values, beliefs, and expectations that people have drive much of this acceleration. Customers have been conditioned to expect quality products and services at competitive prices and in timeframes unheard of one or two decades ago. Customers are being spoiled by faster ways of getting everything. You can see the impact of such expectations when you look at commercials like the one FedEx aired on television a few years back. Remember... “when your package absolutely, positively has to get there overnight...?” As a result, customers are also getting complacent in their expectations. They simply assume that if they want it, service providers will instantaneously provide it...and in many cases they are right. Organizations realize the value in providing service on demand. Things that used to take hours, days and even weeks, are now done almost instantaneously, or in a greatly reduced timeframe. The idea of getting it “now” has so permeated the culture that failure to provide the quickest, most efficient delivery of products and services can be the kiss of death for an organization. As a result of this “get it now” mentality, each subsequent generation has no memory of the longer waiting times experienced by their predecessors. Today, if a customer cannot get what he or she wants from you and your organization, when they want it, they go elsewhere. This increased pressure to provide on a timed schedule can lead to increased stress for you and your co-workers in the workplace.

One important thing to remember is that stress affects different people in different ways. You will likely handle an angry customer’s response or a tight deadline in a different way than a co-worker might. This is due to differing psychological and physical reactions people have in response to stress. Many times, the environmental, job, and personal factors you encounter throughout your day can have a major impact on your mental and physical state. They can also dictate how you react to the stress that you encounter.

For the most part, you are a product of evolution when it comes to your brain’s reaction to stress. When your brain encounters a stressor (something that causes stress in you) it makes a quick evaluation and determination on a course of action. In the days of the Neanderthals (cave people), stress was a daily event. Imagine for a moment that you were alive during that period. You awoke, stretched, and then off you went to get breakfast. As soon as you walked out of the cave, your stress started. Stress was there when you encountered a saber-tooth tiger (who by the way was out looking for breakfast)! This is where the evolution kicks in. Just as in the Neanderthal days, when the brain recognizes or perceives danger (or stress), it triggers a chain reaction of events, starting with the release of chemicals (adrenaline) into the nervous system that allows you to run faster, handle extraordinary situations, and ultimately potentially triumph. In those days, failure to move quickly enough could have deadly consequences.

In the 21st century, when you encounter stressors, your brain releases chemicals and your heart starts beating faster, sending more blood throughout the body. Additionally, your breathing accelerates to take in more oxygen so that you are ready to deal with the situation (fight), or perhaps to leave the area (flight). This reaction has been coined the “fight or flight” syndrome by scientists and researchers. Typically, after spurts of excessive adrenaline and activity, the body needs to take a break to regenerate itself. Think about times where you have worked very hard (possibly studying all night for an exam or preparing for an interview or presentation). You were able to accomplish the task, but subsequently required time to recuperate. Another example you may have heard of is how a very small person was able to do extraordinary things (*e.g.* lifting a car off someone who became trapped when a tire jack collapsed). Because of the changes in metabolism brought on by stressful situations, you and they had the necessary tools to accomplish unusual tasks. These are examples of how the fight or flight syndrome works.

In the customer service environment all the adrenaline pumping and accelerated breathing can either be helpful in resolving customer issues, or it can cause problems if you lose control. On the positive side, getting pumped up with adrenaline and excited about a project can sometimes work in your favor. This is especially true when you have tight deadlines for extended stressful periods. For example, assume that your organization just bought out a rival company and has taken over a newly acquired call center site. The decision has been made to install a completely new computer-based communications system to better handle customer calls and contacts. You have an eight-week window available to move into the new facility, hire and train additional staff, and install the technology before going on-line to take calls. This is going to require you and other employees to work overtime for the entire period. Likely, the task will be accomplished (if eight-weeks was a realistic estimate of time needed), but at the end of that period, you and the others will need time to rest. On the negative side of the fight or flight syndrome in the customer environment, the added adrenaline can create challenges in maintaining the customer-provider relationship. For example, assume that you encounter a very disagreeable customer who has experienced a problem. No matter what positive communication and customer service skills you try, the customer will accept nothing less that what he is demanding. Additionally, he is yelling and using profanity directed at you and the organization. In such a situation, the added adrenaline may lead you to counter inappropriately (fight), which can lead to a breakdown in the customer-provider relationship. Your option in such instances is to remain professional, maintain control, excuse yourself, and then seek a supervisor or someone else to handle the situation (flight).

The speed at which customers expect product and service delivery in the 21st century will likely increase. Prompted by current systems efficiency, customers keep demanding faster service. Some of the things that fuel such expectations are:

* Near instantaneous access to telephone numbers via directory information over the telephone or Internet.
* ATM banking.
* E-mail.
* Cooking by microwave.
* Fax machines.
* One-hour photo processing and glasses.
* Quick Lube type services for oil changes in under a half an hour.
* Convenience stores open early and close late.
* Twenty-four hour supermarkets with banking, floral shops, pharmacies, and delis.
* Express delivery by the U.S. Post Office in less than twenty-four hours.
* Cellular telephone services.
* Beepers.
* Electronic book publishing for out-of-print or out-of-stock books.
* Drive up laundry and dry cleaning windows.
* Twenty-four hour motor club towing services in thirty minutes.
* Credit approvals over the telephone, or in person, in less than an hour.
* Electronic IRS filings for refunds.
* Corrected vision via laser surgery in less than one-half an hour.
* Same day microscopic surgery and hospital release.

**Instructor Note 10-8:** Form equal sized student equal groups and have them discuss the questions in ***Work It Out 10.1 -Fight or Flight?*** for 15-20 minutes. At the end of that time, elicit one example from each group and tie into the previous discussion on stress.

***RECOGNIZING STRESS***

Stress has many observable symptoms, but some that are often difficult to pinpoint. The following are some typical indicators that stress is present:

* *Inability to focus or concentrate* on a customer issue or workplace situation.
* *Irritability* in dealing with others in the workplace.
* *Excessive fatigue* that causes you to daydream, or “nod off” during the day. Excessive fatigue also prevents you from operating at your full potential or exercising initiative.
* *Intestinal irritation* that can affect your appetite or require time away from the workplace for excessive bathroom breaks.
* *Tardiness or absenteeism* to deal with some of the possible physical symptoms or because to catch up on sleep.
* *Being argumentative or aggressive* with customers and others.
* *Nail biting* or other nervous habits *(e.g.* fidgeting, sighing, playing with hair, wringing hands together, or constantly tapping the feet or an object being held)
* *Poor attitude* that manifests itself in phrases like “Who cares,” “It’s not my problem/job,” “Whatever,” or “Tell someone who cares.”
* *Insomnia* that prevents adequate sleep.
* *Rapid or irregular heartbeat* brought on by excess tension.
* *Exaggerated emotions* that can lead to a feeling of depression, crying, or feelings of uselessness and being underappreciated.
* *Binges* where you take in or use excessive amounts of food, alcohol, or tobacco (chain smoking).
* *Physical pains* in the stomach or head, neck or muscle pains, rapid pulse, high blood pressure, or irregular menstrual cycles.

Such symptoms, left unchecked for long periods of time, can cause serious health problems and even death. They can also impact your relationships with others since you are not performing at peak efficiency. Additionally, if you notice any one of these symptoms by itself, you may not need to be overly concerned (unless it lasts for an extended period of time); however, the occurrence of multiple symptoms should be a red flag for you to address the issue and seek assistance. Such help might be in the form of going to your supervisor or team leader to request reassignment of job responsibilities, training, or provision of tools to increase effectiveness. A trip to a medical professional may be required. Whatever you feel is appropriate, the important thing is to take action – quickly. Like many issues in life, taking the ostrich approach to dealing with it (putting your head in a hole in the sand) will not resolve it. Such behavior will only expose you to unseen risks.

**Instructor Note 10-9:** Use ***PowerPoint 10.8 – Recognizing Stress,*** to introduce the three different categories of stress factors present in the workplace that can lead to stress, then show ***PowerPoint 10.9 – Environmental Factors*** and discuss this category.

# Environmental Factors

Many factors in the workplace can add to your stress level.

* **People**

People can be a major source of stress in the workplace. This is true because you

cannot control other people and how they behave. Based on someone’s behavior

style, emotional and mental state, and their unwillingness to communicate

appropriately and effectively, you may find it stressful to deal with them.

* **Physical Factors**

Physical factorssuch asnoise, odors, bright or dim lighting, heat or cold, might

tend to affect you more than someone else in the same environment. For that

reason, your ability to perform at peak efficiency may be inhibited. Such situations

should be brought to the attention of a supervisor or team leader. Additionally,

depending on your job and what is permitted, you could take such actions as

wearing foam ear plugs, or possibly having a radio on your desk that is tuned to a

light easy-listening or instrumental station. Such music often subconsciously

soothes without your conscious awareness of its presence. Depending on the tasks

you are performing; there may be an opportunity to relocate to a quieter office,

cubicle, or work area for short periods as you complete an assignments *(e.g.*

assembling information packets, counting items, or filing).

* **Occupational Hazards**

Hazardsthat create a situation where you have to constantly be concerned for

your safety and that of others can be stressful can lead to employee stress. For

example, dangerous people or situations, heavy equipment or machinery,

flammable, caustic, or explosive materials or heavy lifting. It is important that

you and other workers use caution in such environments.

Your in injury can create problems for yourself, the organization, and ultimately the customer. Wear any safety equipment provided; take your time when performing potentially dangerous tasks, read instructions before using equipment

or performing certain equipment-based tasks, and point out any potentially

dangerous situations to supervisors, team leaders or other appropriate people.

* **Non-ergonomic Situations**

Environments in which chairs, tables, computer equipment, and other tools

provided do not conform with industry standards related to employee protection,

comfort, and safety. Such omissions can lead to back, eye, wrist, hand, arm, and

leg strain among other medical complications. When assigned a work area, make

(or have others make) necessary adjustments to the level of your desk surface,

computer keyboard, computer monitor, telephone location, or anything else that

would increase efficiency and reduce repetitive motion type injuries. If you are

standing in one place for extended periods (*e.g.* manufacturing, assembly work,

cashier, or security staff) request a cushioned floor pad or chair/stool as

appropriate.

* **Organizational Elements**

The organization you work for can play a big role in increasing or decreasing your

stress levels. This is especially true if the organization is undergoing various

degrees of change in structure, product and/or service focus, implementing

technology, reinventing itself to deal with competition and diversity, or many

addressing other challenges.

Two ways that many employees often help reduce their stress levels in such

situations is to request information when it is not readily provided, and to look for

opportunities to get involved in problem-solving and decision-making meetings.

Having some degree of control of your environment can make a lot of difference

in reducing stress.

**Instructor Note 10-10:** Spend a few minutes having students respond to the following questions. When possible, relate their answers to book content or the customer service environment.

What environmental factors have you seen in your workplace or other organizations that might lead to or increase stress levels?

Why do you believe that these factors might lead to stress?

**Job Factors**

Many aspects of your job and organization can impact your stress levels.

**Instructor Note 10-11:** Use ***PowerPoint 10.10 - Job Factors***, to discuss the different aspects of a job that can lead to stress.

* **Job Structure**

Organizational structuresthat require you to work various shifts and/or overtime

in order to complete assigned work can be stressful and ultimately could lead to

physical and mental side effects. Also, whether you are required to work in a

hierarchical or team-based environment can have an impact. Both organizational

structures have advantages and disadvantages based on how they are designed,

managed, and allowed to function.

To improve your personal chances for success, become aware of your job

responsibilities quickly (especially when they change), try to focus on the positive

rather than the negative side of change (*e.g.* new opportunities to learn, enhanced

promotion potential, and a chance at streamlining and becoming more effective

and efficient), and ultimately take advantage of the changing situation. “Victims”

(people who wait for someone to tell them what to do) rarely win in changing

environments. As organizations look to cut overhead costs, make the system more

efficient, and better serve customers, they look for employees who can best

support such goals. Make yourself more marketable by continually gaining new

knowledge and skills to better prepare you for the inevitable change that will

occur in your organization.

* **Job Insecurity**

Employees often go through a period of insecurity when major changes in the

organization occur. Some of this can be attributed to the behavioral style

preferences discussed in other chapters while much of it is simply human nature.

Such insecurity is often the result of a lack of adequate and effective

communication from upper management coupled with and a volatile industry or

job market. An example of the latter is a technology-based organization that is

dependent upon military or government contracts during a period when legislators

are downsizing government spending. In such times, employees may be laid off

when contracts are missed or cancelled.

If you find yourself in such a situation, use a proactive approach of gathering

information, asking questions of your employers, reading materials given to you

by the organization, taking the opportunity to get involved on committees or

projects, and generally becoming a “player” rather than an “observer” as change

occurs.

* **Unreasonable Goals**

Goals are part of job performance in most organizations. There are personal and

organization goals. You will typically be held accountable for personal goals that

can ultimately influence organizational goal attainment.

Unfortunately, too many supervisors and team leaders set goals with little or no

personal input from the employees who ultimately have to meet those goals.

Employees are held accountable for unrealistic production (dollar volume) goals,

and in some organizations have their results publicly displayed for others to see.

This practice can lead to employees who become disillusioned and often develop

low morale, resentment, and frustration.

Help yourself and your organization by jotting down personal and performance

goals throughout the year, so that when time to set your performance goals for the

next evaluation period comes around, you can have some input. This might be a

personal goal (*e.g.* you want to learn a new software or skill to better prepare you

for job openings that occur from time to time) or it might be job-related (*e.g.* you

need additional knowledge or skills to better perform you job and serve customers). By being proactive and demonstrating to your supervisor or team leader that you care about the goals set for you, you could find yourself in an elevated position of esteem in their eyes since most employees do not take such

actions.

* **Conflicting Demands**

Jobs that require employees to wear many “hats” and multitask regularly can

increase stress levels. All employees have multiple responsibilities in today’s

competitive environment. Naturally, these demands may sometimes conflict.

While most employees ultimately prevail and accomplish job tasks, there may be

times when you may not achieve the degree of success that you prefer and desire.

This is often due to the fact that your need and efforts to provide quality service

will be hampered by restrictions caused by established policies and procedures or

by other factors out of your control.

Additionally, personal demands on you off the job can cause internal conflict for

you while you are on the job. A good time management system is sometimes the

answer. For other situations, you may have to use your interpersonal communication skills to negotiate a settlement or compromise. Remember that

you cannot always eliminate sources of stress so you have to seek alternative ways of dealing with them.

* **Repetitive Tasks**

Many positions require employees to do repetitive tasks *(e.g.* data entry,

manufacturing, cashiering, and some call center positions) that provide little or no

opportunity for initiative or change in routine. Such responsibilities can lead

boredom or to a lackadaisical concern for job quality and lowered morale. If you

find yourself in such a position; you might volunteer for additional assignments,

committees, or cross-training in order to break the monotony and better qualify

you for other positions.

* **Limited Authority**

One of the most frustrating situations for service providers and customers occurs

when the provider does not have the authority needed to make decisions or assist

customers without having to get approval. For example, a customer calls or comes to your organization and wants a refund, but you do not have the authority because the item cost is over your authorization limit (say $100). This type of situation sets up potential customer confrontation and resentment and can ultimately cause lost business.

If you find yourself in similar circumstances, try suggesting alternative systems

for dealing with customer returns to your management. There may be reasons why a system cannot be changed, but you will never know unless you ask.

* **Limited Opportunities for Advancement**

Another job factor that can often create challenges for employees and their

organizationsoccurs when upward or lateral job mobility and opportunities for

professional development are limited. Such roadblocks to professional and personal goal achievement or “dead end jobs” can dampen the desire to

excel, use creativity and initiative, or remain in the job.

To counter this, many organizations offer on-site as well as computer-based

training opportunities. Taking advantage of such opportunities builds current job

efficiency and also prepares you for future situations.

**Instructor Note 10-12:** Have students offer ideas of what they would say to their current or future boss if they could make one suggestion for reducing stress in the customer service environment. Have them explain why they would make their recommendations. When possible, relate their answers to book content or the customer service environment.

**Instructor Note 10-13:** Have students complete ***Work It Out 10.2 - Personal Job Stressors*** then discuss their responses as a group. Randomly elicit examples and flip chart these as the discussion progresses. Additionally, as they offer examples, ask them why they believe the factor to be stressful. Get a show of hands from the other students to see if they agree. When there is disagreement, stop to discuss what they believe causes the differing perceptions. Tie this into personal differences, behavior styles, diversity and some of the other elements studied in this book.

As a follow-up to this activity, you may also want to have students brainstorm ways to deal with or eliminate the stressors that they have identified. You can flip chart these ideas for future reference as you go through text material.

**Personal Factors**

Many of the things that people do in their life outside the workplace carry over into it. Their habits, actions, and other elements of their life can create unnecessary stress.

**Instructor Note 10-14:** Use *PowerPoint 10.11 - Personal Factors* to discuss the different personal aspects of the job that can lead to stress.

* **Relationships**

If organizations could place a box at the entrance to their building with a sign

saying “Leave your personal baggage here. Pick it up on your way out,” it would

be wonderful. In realty, this cannot be done. People are complex creatures. You

cannot disassociate yourself from others very easily. As a result, there is

emotional “baggage” that you bring with you to work each day. For example, if

you have an argument with a spouse, significant other, child, family member, or

friend, that emotional encounter will stay in your head as you report to work.

Other aspects of relationships can also create stress (for example, a spouse, child,

or roommate who does not do his or her equal part in such areas as helping with

household chores, grocery shopping, or paying the bills). In such situations, your

communication skills learned earlier can be a great help. Work to negotiate an

equitable arrangement. If necessary, you may want to get an outside intermediary

involved (*e.g.* counselor or financial planner). Such resources are often available

through employee assistance programs at work.

From a positive perspective, your relationships with others outside the workplace

can actually provide you with valuable tools for dealing with customers. In

interacting with others outside of the workplace, you learn more about behavioral

styles, diversity, human nature, and many of the other concepts related to people.

This can strengthen relationships in the workplace.

* **Physical Condition and Nutrition**

How well you maintain your body can have a major impact on the way you feel,

your energy level, the ability to think clearly and creatively, and ultimately how

long you live. Recent reports of the “fattening” of Americans is alarming. After

years of healthy eating and exercising practices, Americans are reverting to a less active lifestyle. If you are not actively monitoring your food intake and

exercising, you could be setting yourself up for problems and lessening the

chances that you will be ready to face any customer service or workplace situation

that surfaces.

* **Chemical Use**

Drinking, smoking, taking drugs, or using any other chemical substance at all can

potentially be deadly and can reduce your effectiveness on the job. Most health

plans offered by organizations these days offer assistance in educating and

reducing dependency on such items. If you use any of the substances listed, you

may want to check with your supervisor to see if there are options to help you

change your behavior.

* **Financial problems**

If you are like most people, you have monetary problems from time to time.

Either there is not enough money in your checking account to cover expenses or

you don’t have expendable cash to make a purchase you would like to. These

issues can weigh heavily on your mind and distract from your effectiveness in

dealing with customers. If you are experiencing such a problem, look for

resources (*e.g.* books, classes, and help through an Employee Assistance Program

at work) that can assist you in getting back on sound financial footing.

* **Lack of “alone time”**

Taking time for yourself is crucial for good mental hygiene. Sometimes the

pressures of work and family responsibilities cause extreme stress levels to build.

When this happens unchecked, you potentially become a bomb with a short fuse

waiting to be lit. And, if the match comes in the form of a difficult customer

situation, which can create problems for you, your organization, and your customer. Often, taking time to refocus or spend time alone is beneficial throughout the day to allow a service provider to “clear their head.” Build time into your schedule for you. Go read a book, watch a movie, or do whatever YOU want to do. This sometimes takes negotiation with others in your personal and work life, but the dividends are worth the effort.

* **Overworking**

Does the term workaholic apply to you? Due to the competitive nature of the

workplace, concerns about job security, over extension of credit by banks,

downsizing/ rightsizing (or capsizing) in many organizations, and numerous other

factors, a lot of people in the workplace spend more time at work than elsewhere.

If you are such a person, the positive side is that more work is being done and you

gain new skills and knowledge while potentially moving up the career ladder. The

down side is that other facets of your life may be suffering or failing. The key to

your real long-term success is balance. You can obtain some of that through

effective time usage.

Here are some quick questions to help determine if you might fall into the

workaholic category. If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, there is a

good chance that you are a workaholic.

-*Do you arrive early for work, no matter how late you stayed the night before?*

*-Do you volunteer to take on new tasks, even if you already feel overwhelmed?*

*-Do you skip lunch and breaks (and sometimes dinner) in order to work on job-related tasks?*

*-Do you regularly volunteer for overtime or work on weekends and holidays?*

*-Do you find it difficult to be inactive or relax?*

*-Do you approach every activity as a competition or challenge (even leisure*

*activities or hobbies)?*

*-Do you find it hard to take a vacation (and when you do, you take work along)?*

*-Can you not envision yourself ever retiring?*

**Instructor Note 10-15:** Have students complete ***Work It Out 10.3 - Personal Factors*** ***That Create Stress***, and then randomly elicit some of their examples. Discuss and tie into chapter content, as appropriate.

***AVOIDING STRESS THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION***

As we have explored in many of the other chapters, your key tool for success when dealing with customers is your ability to communicate in a positive, effective manner. By practicing active listening, selecting words and nonverbal cues carefully, then selecting the right time and place to deliver your message; you can significantly improve customer relationships and reduce stress levels (for you and your customers) at the same time.

The following are specific strategies for communicating with customers.

**Instructor Note 10-16:** Use ***PowerPoint 10.12 - Avoiding Stress Through Effective Communication*** to discuss some techniques for communicating in a manner that reduces stress or avoids adding tension to a situation.

**Be Polite**

Think of all the things you have been taught throughout your life related to courtesy. You may have heard statements such as, “You can catch more flies with sugar,” or were reminded to always say “Please” and “Thank you.” Whatever you learned, the concepts are the same --- treat people well and with respect, and a situation will go much better. This is especially helpful in highly emotional or stressful encounters. By simply acknowledging your customer as an important person, you can sometimes get them to calm their own emotions, thus reducing stress levels for both of you. If nothing else, they will sometimes start to become embarrassed or feel bad about the way they are treating you and will calm down.

**Respond Appropriately to Messages Received**

When a customer asks a question or makes a statement, it is crucial that you listen and respond in a suitable manner. Summarizing what was said is one technique to accomplish this. Failure to do so can frustrate and irritate the customer or lead to escalated emotion.

Recognize that your customers are just like you with respect to daily pressures and stressors. They come to you and your organization to fulfill a need or obtain something they want, not to receive poor service or defective products, or to add more stress to their lives. They also do not expect to find you or someone else in a non-receptive mood. If you and the organization disappoint the customer, he or he will likely become irritated or upset. A key point to remember is that while the customer may or may not have a legitimate complaint when he or she contacts you, it is your job to listen and problem solve in an effort to resolve the issue to the best of your ability, and in a manner that will satisfy the customer.

**Speak Assuredly**

As you learned in Chapter 3, there is a difference between assertive and aggressive language and voice tones. When a customer or someone else is upset, it is best to allow him or her to vent without immediate response. This can take the edge off an otherwise stressful situation. When you do speak, do so clearly and with authority and confidence. Additionally, stay calm as you communicate. Do not let the other person push your hot buttons (*e.g.* words or actions that you do not like or that irritate you) or draw you into an emotional dialogue. Such a reaction will only tend to escalate the emotion and will not allow you to lead the conversation toward resolution.

**Use “I” Language**

Remember what you have learned about word choice. While the word “you” can sound accusatory and challenging, “I” language can take on responsibility and sound like you are trying to partner to resolve an issue. For example, assume a customer came into your store with a complaint that a power tool does not work right, all the while reiterating that he or she had a similar one before and that he or she has read the owner’s manual. If you said something like “You’re incorrect...” there would likely be a confrontation. On the other hand if you said something like, “I’m not sure, but I believe that if you do .... it will work fine. May I please show you?” In the second example, you are working with the customer in a non-threatening manner to resolve the issue without challenging him or her. You are also asking permission while using the word “please.”

**Communicate Your Feelings**

A big factor contributing to stress is failing to give feedback or to express yourself effectively. If something or someone is bothering you, think about how to address the issue, and then tactfully and professionally approach the person or issue. Keeping feelings or emotions bottled up inside can cause undue stress and ultimately could lead to relationship breakdown and illness. Management consultant and author, Ken Blanchard, calls this storing of feelings “gunny sacking.” He equates carrying built up emotions around to putting them in an imaginary sack that you carry. Whenever someone does something you dislike or object to, you throw it into your sack. Simultaneously you may grumble something like, “I hate it when he/she does that,” or “There he/she goes again.

One of these days I’m going to talk to him/her about that.” What often occurs in such instances is that at some point a small thing sets off the emotional powder keg you have

stored and you begin to unload on the person with statements like, “I hate it when you do such and such,” “And another thing you do that makes me crazy,” and “In addition....” At this point the unsuspecting recipient of all your feedback is likely dumbfounded because she or he had no idea you were harboring all the feeling you are unleashing. The result --- you may feel better, but your relationship may be irreparably damaged.

As we discussed in Chapter 3 related to feedback, it is far better to share your feelings in a low-key rational manner than to save them and explode. The latter approach may ignite the other person’s fuse and you could end up with a highly charged emotional argument or even violence. Instead, when something occurs that bothers you, take the time to provide immediate (or as soon as possible) feedback to the person. Discuss the behavior, the impact it had, your feelings on the issue, listen to his or her side of the situation, offer suggestions where appropriate, and reaffirm the value of the relationship to you. These simple things can mean so much in maintaining a strong relationship with a customer or

someone else in your life.

**Instructor Note 10-17:** Ask students to share their experience where they have seen someone store up emotions and then release them all at once on someone. How did the situation end? What are constructive ways for relieving stress and preventing such occurrences in the service environment? Discuss the customer service implications of the behavior they describe.

***MAINTAINING YOUR SANITY***

Based on the statistics you read about earlier, you can probably identify many things that add stress to your personal life. With the added stress of dealing with difficult customers, how can you keep your sanity?

**Instructor Note 10-18:** *Use* ***PowerPoint slides 10.13 - Maintaining Your Sanity(1), 10.14 - Maintaining Your Sanity(2), and 10.15 - Maintaining Your Sanity(3)*** to discuss various stress-reducing strategies.

Refer students to ***Figure 10-5 - Stress Reduction Strategies***, as part of your discussion of this section.

**Stay Calm**

Even though a customer or someone else does or says something that angers or upsets you, stay in control. When an incident occurs that raises your frustration or emotion, keep smiling inside, politely excuse yourself, and take a quick break from the situation. Breathe deeply and think of more pleasant issues. Either return once you cool down or ask someone else to handle the person.

**Manage Your Time Effectively**

Chapter 11will provide you with some ideas and specific tips for effectively managing

you time. The key to successful customer service is that if you don't have a system in

place, you need to establish one. Additionally, there are many good books, audiotapes,

videos, and seminars that teach organization and task management skills. Learning and

practicing these skills can help take the pressure off you. Taking care of difficult tasks

first thing in the day prevents dreading them all day.

**Avoid Procrastination**

As you record tasks that might need attention, take care of them. Putting them off only

adds the stress of "one more thing to do." If you have tasks that seem overwhelming,

break them into manageable chunks and work on one small piece at a time. For example,

assume that you have been given the task of going through all correspondence files for

the past year to determine recurring complaints. In such an instance, ask if you can do a

portion at a time and then do so. If you are given permission to divide the work into

chunks, you might possibly work on three months of files per day throughout a week

until you have completed a review of all of them.

**Prioritize Tasks**

You will learn strategies for effective time management in Chapter 11. Specific

techniques such as, making a list of tasks to be accomplished at the end of each day or

first thing in the morning, then following through on them can help reduce your stress

level. When using that technique, tasks not handled by the end of the day may become a

high priority on your list for the following day.

**Set Realistic Goals**

Many people subject themselves to more unnecessary stress by reacting as events occur. By setting attainable goals, you stay on track and feel a sense of accomplishment when you reach them. Also, get in the habit of rewarding yourself when goals are reached. Do this by taking a stretch break or going for a snack or other small prize to help encourage better customer service efforts.

**Take Frequent Breaks**

Too many service providers get caught up in the negative practice of skipping breaks and lunch or calling customers for hours at a time. This is a mistake since your mind needs an occasional escape from the routine of dealing with customers and workplace activities. Taking such periods away from customers and job tasks can revitalize you mentally. If you also build in some exercise as suggested in the next section of this chapter, you double the benefit. Additionally, if you get away with co-workers occasionally during the day (*e.g.* breaks, lunch, or brief chats between customers) you have an opportunity to strengthen workplace relationships while networking and sharing new ideas, thoughts, and information. All of this can be very valuable to your long-term health and success. Take opportunities during lunch or breaks to go outside the building to read, for fresh air, to walk, for a change of scenery, or to meet with friends. You’ll return refreshed and ready to deal with customers again.

**Exercise Regularly**

Even though there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything that you

have to do in your personal and work life, exercise is one thing that you should try to

keep in your schedule. Exercise can provide many benefits, including prevention of

emotional trauma brought on by stressful situations. Practices such as using the stairs

instead of the elevator or escalator, walking at lunch time, taking a brisk walk before or

after work, riding a bicycle to the convenience store rather than driving, and other such

options, can add significantly to a feeling of better health.

You can even exercise right on the job. Try using some simple isometric exercises

(pushing against your chair seat or desk, grasping the edges of your chair seat and pulling

firmly as you are seated, or keeping the feet flat on the floor while seated and pushing

down against the floor). You can also do simple stretching activities, (raising arms above

your head and reaching toward the ceiling, rolling your head in slow motions, and

bending slowly to touch your toes).

**Eliminate Vagueness**

Much stress is due to uncertainty. To help reduce the chances of this happening, research

solutions, ask questions, or set up a system to deal with various situations that occur in

your job or personal life. For example, assume that a certain customer situation comes up

periodically, yet no policy or procedure exists to deal with it. You may check to see what

other customer service professionals do in similar situations and then suggest to your

team leader or supervisor that your organization implement a standard policy or

procedure using similar approaches.

**Reduce Personal Tensions**

You cannot switch off your brain related to personal issues while you're at work. Instead,

take the time to deal with factors in your personal life as they surface. Ignoring them will

only frustrate you. Also, strive for balance in your personal and professional life (*e.g.*

instead of spending all your waking hours working, develop a hobby, take a trip, spend

time with friends and loved ones or just relax). Too much time and energy spent on either

work or relaxation can mean a deficit in the other.

**Use Positive Self-Talk**

Researchers have found that by giving oneself positive as opposed to negative messages, life in general is not as overwhelming.

Consult your inner self by telling yourself positive things such as, "I can handle this,” "I

won't let this get to me," "This is only a temporary event and a year from now, it will

have no meaning." Too often people get caught up in negative self-talk, which is

unhealthy. They tell themselves things such as:

“I can’t do this.”

“I’m not good at ...”

“I can’t do anything right.”

“Why can’t I be more like...?”

“This is so stupid.”

If you tell yourself (or others) these types of things often enough, they might become a reality because initiative is eliminated as defeat is accepted. This can lead to stress and depression.

**Vary Your Activities**

You may have heard the phrase, “Variety is the spice of life.” Variety is also crucial for

preventing mental burnout. Your brain needs stimulation and challenge. If you follow the

same routine day in and out, you have little opportunity to develop new ideas, explore

other alternatives, and allow the brain to grow.

Be creative in your job and personal life. If you usually get up at 6:30 a.m., try getting up

at 6:00 a.m. to read the paper, watch the news, or go for a walk or bicycle ride. If you

always eat in the company cafeteria, try getting together with others to go off-site. If you

usually follow one route to and from work, try an alternative. All of these techniques add

variety. By varying routine and what you see or experience, you will generate new ideas

and perspectives. This can lead to reduced stress and increased job performance and

satisfaction.

Making some of the minor routine changes shown in *Figure 10-5, Stress-Reduction Strategies*,

can often lead to enhanced creativity, differing perspectives, and a feeling of being

refreshed or renewed. The reason for this is that the brain is exposed to new and different

stimuli that causes it to work harder as it adapts and learns. This can lead to more

effective work performance and better interactions with customers and others in the

workplace.

**Instructor Note 10-19**

Refer students to ***Figure 10.6 - Mental Stimulators***, to provide some examples of variances that they might try. Solicit additional ones from them.

**Get More Sleep**

According to the Better Sleep Council in Alexandria, Virginia, most people do not get

enough sleep. Each person is different in the amount of sleep needed to feel efficient.

Typically, eight hours of sleep has been recommended for years by various sources. If

you find yourself tying to “catch up” on your sleep during weekends, your body is telling

g you that it is sleep deprived during the week. Instead of staying up to watch the late

news or a show on television, turn off the set and go to bed earlier. If you really want to

see the program, videotape it for viewing later. Or, watch the early morning news offered

on stations in most cities.

If you are a shift worker or work nights, try the following tips for a better sleep period:

* Make sure the room in which you sleep is dark and quiet. Use heavy window coverings to block out light.
* Make sure the room is cool, approximately 65 degrees Fahrenheit (18 degrees Celsius).
* Ensure that your mattress is comfortable, supportive, and allows room to move around comfortably.

**Take a Humor Break**

Getting the endorphins going in the brain stimulates and relaxes it. Humor can cause this to happen. Read, view, or listen to something humorous. In the workplace, you might take a break with some of your peers. Share humorous experiences that you have had in dealing with customers. You might even learn some effective customer service strategies of which you were not aware.

**Find a Hobby**

Most people who participate in a hobby that they enjoy (*e.g.* gardening, ceramics,

painting, dancing, or photography) find that it relaxes them by providing a mental

diversion (as discussed earlier). Whether you look for an active or sedentary activity

depends on your time, desires, and capabilities. The key is to do what you want and like.

**Be a Realist**

You are not superwoman or superman, don’t try to act like you are. Recognize that you

cannot do everything yourself, or take on all opportunities offered to you. Trying to do so

will ultimately cause you to burn out mentally, can lead to serious health problems, and

can reduce your effectiveness and efficiency in dealing with people and situations. It is sometimes best to say “I can’t do any more right now” when your boss or co-worker asks you to take on additional tasks. Learn to negotiate. If they want to give you more work, ask what they can take over or what can go on the back burner.

Use some of the time management strategies found in Chapter 11 to assist in increasing

your performance output while decreasing your intake of stress.

**Take a Mental Trip**

Doing something that relaxes you is a good way to reduce stress levels. Even short breaks can help. Close your eyes and relax as you think of pleasant events or locations. Instead of listening to loud, reverberating music with words, try something light, instrumental, or low key as you drift away in your mind.

**Smile**

The old adage of " laughter is the best medicine" has merit. Try to find something

humorous about the situations you encounter at work and home. This can help reduce tensions. Lighten up by not taking everything people say so seriously or personally. If you approach each customer and situation with skepticism, you will likely project a non-verbal image of being unapproachable. This can turn people away mentally and create potential conflict situations.

By smiling, other people often return the gesture. This typically feels good and is less stressful.

**Instructor Note 10-20:** Have students complete ***Worksheet 10.1 - Coping With Stress*** (<http://www.mhhe.com/lucas05>), then spend a few minutes discussing their responses.

After students have developed a list of approaches to coping with stress using the worksheet, lead them through the relaxation exercise in ***Work It Out, 10.4 - Stress Reduction Activity***. Talk about the value in their repeating the activity on their own whenever they are feeling stressed on the job.

***WORKPLACE VIOLENCE***

Prior to 1980, workplace violence was virtually unheard of. Since then, the culture of the workplace has changed dramatically due to many factors addressed in other parts of this book (*e.g.* diversity, organizational restructuring, downsizing, technology, and increased job demands). Other external factors are also adding fuel to this smoldering fire (*e.g.* substance abuse, shifting societal values and beliefs, illegal drugs, violence on television and in movies, and a general trend to lash out at others in the form of verbal or physical assault, such as road rage).

Violence in the workplace is nearing epidemic proportions and is creating a true crisis. According to research by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), “Violence is a substantial contributor to occupational injury and death, and homicide has become the second leading cause of occupational injury death. Each week, an average of 20 workers are murdered and 18,000 assaulted while at work or on duty. Nonfatal assaults result in millions of lost workdays and cost workers millions of dollars in lost wages.” Additionally, NIOSH found that “Workplace violence is clustered in certain occupational settings: For example, the retail trade and service industries account for more than half the workplace homicides (56%) and 85% of nonfatal workplace assaults. Taxicab drivers have the highest risk of workplace homicides of any occupational group. Workers in healthcare, community services, and retail settings are at increased risk of nonfatal assaults.” Statistically, the persons in greatest potential peril are those employees whose jobs involve routine public contact and the exchange of money. Obviously, these figures indicate an issue worth being aware of and being concerned about.

**Instructor Note 10-21:** Use ***PowerPoint 10.16 - Workplace Violence***, to discuss the trend towards violence in the workplace. Elicit examples of situations of violence that students have witnessed in a service environment either as a customer or provider.

**Preventing Workplace Violence**

Each employee must take a proactive role in dealing with and preventing workplace violence. A key to prevention is to conduct yourself in a professional manner at all times, keeping in mind the positive communication skills outlined in this book. By doing so, you are less likely to escalate a situation into an emotional confrontation or provoke a violent reaction from others. Additionally, it is important to educate yourself on strategies for recognizing danger signals and how to address them. At the very least, talk to your supervisor about the organization’s approach to dealing with violence and plan your own escape route from the work area, in the event you ever need it.

**Recognizing Potential Offenders**

It is important to recognize unhealthy behaviors that others might exhibit so that you can avoid such people and situations in which you might have to deal with them.

In the past few decades, many law enforcement and private organizations have sought to identify a profile of potentially dangerous people in the workplace, based on previous offenders. The following are offered for your awareness, not to make you suspicious of someone who fits the profile. Also, keep in mind that due to many factors, such as issues going on in someone’s life when you encounter him or her, anyone could potentially become violent under the right circumstances. Some general characteristics of offenders include:

**Instructor Note 10-22:** Show ***PowerPoint 10-17 – Potential Offenders***

* White male between 35-45 years of age.
* A history of work/job change.
* Takes constructive feedback or criticism poorly.
* Interested in firearms and other weapons.
* Identifies or talks about violence.
* A loner with few friends and little family contact.
* Fails to take responsibility or blame when errors occur.
* May use drugs and/or alcohol.

**Identifying Warning Signs**

Many people who are prone to violence exhibit telltale behaviors, that when

viewed in totality, should be a warning sign for you and those around you. By

being vigilant, you can possibly head off trouble by changing your approach to dealing with a possible offender, or at least reporting the behavior that you observe to a supervisor, team leader, human resources, and/or security.

The following are possible indicators that someone could potentially become violent under the right circumstances.

**Instructor Note 10-23:** Use *PowerPoint 10.18- Identifying Warning Signs* to discuss telltale signs of potential violent behavior. Solicit other examples from students.

* **History of violence**

If someone discloses to you that in the past they have been involved in

violent criminal acts, domestic violence, have had verbal or physical confrontations with others, you may want to be alert. Typically, past

behavior is a good indicator of future repetition. This is especially true if the person seems to brag about their past negative or antisocial behavior.

* **Romantic obsession**

Many instances (and movies) arerelated to the theme of someone who becomes

obsessed with another person. In such scenarios, the stalker subsequently pursues

his or her trophy relentlessly even when the other person tells him or her in no

uncertain terms that he or she is not interested. In these movies, someone is

typically hurt or killed as a result of the obsession. A strong message is present

there. If someone seems to have such an obsession with you or someone else in

your workplace, seek assistance immediately by reporting it to your

supervisor/team leader, AND human resources department.

* **Alcohol or chemical abuse**

Substance abuse can be the deciding factor in sending someone over the

edge. If a customer or co-worker shows signs of being under the influence

on the job, confidentially report it to your supervisor/team leader immediately. In

some serious situations when a co-worker’s activities off the job are negatively

influencing his or her on-the-job performance, you may want to approach your

supervisor/team leader to inform him or her. It is unfair to you, your customers,

and the organization if your co-worker cannot do his or her job because of outside

activities.

* **Depression**

Depression is a major contributor to suicides and workplace violence. Depression

can certainly influence workplace performance and the ability to deliver quality

customer service. If someone’s level of stress has reached a high point and is

causing depression and a general appearance of them not caring, it may be time to

speak to the person confidentially (if he or she is a friend) to encourage him or her

to seek assistance. Many times, someone’s feelings of depression can be brought

on by personal problems (*e.g.* a relationship, financial, or legal problem) or by

workplace issues (*e.g.* dissatisfaction, disciplinary actions, termination, or poor

relationships with others). In extreme cases, you may also want to alert your

supervisor/team leader.

* **Threatening behavior**

All threats should be taken seriously. When someone becomes verbally

and/or physically threatening, harassing, or belligerent, it is a cry for help and

should not be ignored. Even if he or she apologizes, recognize that something is

not right. Should you receive a threat face-to-face, in writing, or over telephone,

report it immediately to your supervisor/team leader, or to whomever your

organization’s policy dictates.

* **Mental conditions**

Obviously you are not a psychiatrist and should not try to act like one in

diagnosing a person’s behavior. However, as someone who deals with

people day in and out in your job, you can likely recognize unusual behavior. For

example, when you note co-workers who demonstrate a noticeable decrease in

attention to their hygiene or appearance, have serious mood swings, become

withdrawn, complain about a supervisor, their job, customers, or the organization

excessively and dramatically, and/or display empathy for people who commit

violent acts, you should be concerned. You should also closely monitor customers

who send cues such as erratic gestures, talking to himself or herself, responding to

or asking questions illogically, or referring to imaginary people or objects. Such

people may be harmless, but you can never tell what is affecting their behavior.

What is affecting the person could be a mental condition or he or she may be

under the influence of some substance. Either way, keep your distance, and

casually seek assistance.

# *CHAPTER SUMMARY*

**Instructor Note 10-24:** Spend a few minutes to review the key aspects of the chapter. Review the objectives in doing so and use a question-and-answer format to determine what students learned.

Stress is a costly and nonproductive entity in the workplace and in your personal life. Throughout this chapter, you have explored what stress is, the causes and costs, factors that contribute to increasing stress, strategies for reducing or eliminating it, and the trend toward workplace violence. A key step in reducing stress and violence is education. Using the material in this chapter can help make you more productive and potentially improve the quality of your life. By identifying and eliminating stressors in your life, you can enhance the enjoyment you receive from your job and deliver a higher degree of quality to your customers.

*SERVICE IN ACTION – DARDEN RESTAURANTS*

**Instructor Note 10-25:**

Examine the success of Darden Restaurants and tie in the concept of people looking for casual settings to help them deal with a stressful world. You might want to gather additional information on the company from the Internet and bring it to class.

*KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS*

**Instructor Note 10-26:**

Use the key terms and concepts at the end of the chapter as a review vehicle, if desired. This might be in the form of a verbal quiz in which you ask students randomly to define the terms or describe the concepts.

***CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS***

**Instructor Note 10-27:** Have students individually answer the Chapter Review questions, then review their answers as a group.

**Possible responses to Chapter Review questions:**

1. **How does eustress benefit you?** Eustress provides the stimulation needed for growth, development, and change. With eustress, you may go through the same physiological stages that you would for negative stress, but the end result is a feeling of accomplishment and exhilaration when you reach your goal.
2. **Define the “fight or flight” syndrome.** When the brain recognizes or perceives danger (or stress) it triggers a chain reaction of events, starting with the release of chemicals (adrenaline) into the nervous system that allows you to run faster, handle extraordinary situations, and ultimately potentially triumph. Encountering stressors, your heart starts beating faster, sending more blood throughout the body. Your breathing accelerates to take in more oxygen so that you are ready to deal with the situation (fight), or perhaps to leave the area (flight).
3. **What are some signs of stress?** Inability to focus or concentrate, excessive fatigue, intestinal irritation, tardiness or absenteeism, being argumentative or aggressive, nail biting, poor attitude, insomnia, rapid or irregular heartbeat exaggerated emotions, binges, and physical pains.

4. **What are five environmental factors that contribute to increased stress?**

People, physical factors, occupational hazards, non-ergonomic situations, and organizational factors.

5. **What job factors contribute to increased stress levels?**

Job structure, job insecurity, unreasonable goals, conflicting demands, repetitive **tasks, limited authority, and limited opportunities for advancement.**

6**. What are the personal factors that contribute to higher stress levels?**

Relationships, physical condition and nutrition, chemical use, monetary problems, lack of “alone” time, and overworking.

7**. What are some of the communication strategies that can lead to reduced stress?**

Being polite, responding appropriately to messages, speaking assuredly, using “I” language, and communicating feelings.

8. **What are some strategies for maintaining your sanity in the workplace?**

Staying calm, managing time effectively, avoiding procrastination, prioritizing tasks, setting realistic goals, taking frequent breaks, exercising regularly, eliminating vagueness from the job, reducing personal tensions, using positive self-talk, varying activities, getting more sleep, taking a humor break, finding a hobby, being a realist, taking a mental trip, and smiling.

9. **What does the typical violent offender in the workplace look like?**

White male between 35-45 years of age.

A history of work/job change.

Takes constructive feedback or criticism poorly.

Interested in firearms and other weapons.

Identifies or talks about violence.

Loner with few friends and little family contact.

Fails to take responsibility or blame when errors occur.

May use drugs and/or alcohol.

10. **What are some warning signs of potential violence with someone in the**

**workplace?**

A person has a history of violence, romantic obsessions, alcohol or

chemical abuse, is depressed, threatens others, or exhibits signs of a mental

condition.

***SEARCH IT OUT***

**Instructor Note 10-28:** Have students select and research one of the options in the Search It Out activity as an out-of-class assignment. Tell them they should be ready to present their findings at the next scheduled class meeting.

***COLLABORATIVE LEARNING***

**Instructor Note 10-29:** You can offer students the opportunity to work individually or in groups on the Collaborative Learning activity.

***FACE TO FACE***

**Instructor Note 10-30:** Have students read the case study, then individually answer the questions at the end. Once they have finished (approximately 8-15 minutes) form equal sized groups and have them discuss their answers. After 20 minutes, bring the class together and have them share their responses.

Possible answers to Face to Face:

1. **What are some of the stressful environmental factors present in this scenario with which you are dealing?** A variety of diverse patient backgrounds to

deal with (*e.g.* from other countries, elderly/young, and male/female) are

present. A merger is taking place between the hospital and Houston General.

A number of different types of ailments and injuries are coming in, often

simultaneously. The temperature in the waiting room is extremely high.

A possibly dangerous and abusive patient with whom you have to

Deal complicates matters.

1. What are some of the stressful job factors present in this scenario with which you are dealing? Issues of concern for job security due to the merger are present, the emergency room is understaffed; there are conflicting issues (between the job and home); your job advancements are limited; and the amount of time required on the job and away from your daughter all contribute to stress.
2. **What are some of the stressful personal factors in this scenario with which you are dealing?** You are tired, possibly sick, have not eaten recently, and have a sick teenaged daughter at home.
3. **How would you handle the situation with the last patient? Explain.** Remain calm and not get taunted by his comments, empathize with him, be assertive,

approach the patient with caution, have the security person, orderly and

paramedics restrain the man, evaluate him quickly, and get him medical

attention and if possible release him. If he is in fact under the influence,

possibly call a family member or someone to come for him. If he requires

hospitalization, follow standard protocol and policy for such situations.

1. **What are the potential problems in this situation?** Fatigue and stress could cause a mistake or error in your judgment. Due to many stress factors present (*e.g.* number of people being seen, temperature, and lack of staff) there is potential for escalated emotions. A potential for violence with the last patient is likely.

*PLANNING TO SERVE*

**Instructor Note 10-31:**

Have students work individually or in groups to complete the Planning to Serve activity.