



Management and Performance Associates – June 2009

Two reasons to be remembered for ...

“Stress is not what happens to us. It's our response to what happens. And response is something we can choose.”

Maureen Killoran

Our last issue was an analogy of the “Susan Boyle” phenomenon, where we emphasized the importance of not judging people by their appearance. We had just sent out the newsletters, when the international media went crazy again: Susan Boyle was hospitalized due to stress...

According to Wikipedia, *stress is the body's physiological reaction, encompassing several **defense mechanisms**, to face a situation that is perceived as **threatening** or involving **increased demands**.*

Let's analyze this definition about the most defining sign of our time, also known as “General Adaptation Syndrome.” It is a **physiological reaction** because it is translated into multiple physical symptoms, such as tachycardia—each brought on by the release of adrenaline. We create a defense mechanism when facing on-going situations that provoke stress by turning on a series of recognizable alarms, such as anxiety, depression, muscle pain, lack of attention and insomnia. **Threatening situations?** We all, to a lesser or greater extent, are exposed to change, much more frequently than we would like. Although some people find change stimulating and exciting, most of us experience it as a threat which is translated in our minds as: distress; a sensation of paralysis; and loss (not to mention when change is imposed on us). One final point: our workload seems to constantly undergo transformation, leading to **increased demands**. To do more in less time, with fewer resources, connected 24 hours a day to some source of virtual or real communication; it is all part of the global day to day. Therefore, by far, stress is not an isolated event, and the conditions are present so that we have to live with this syndrome on a daily basis. Adaptation is the key In order to reach harmony.

Of course the problem gets worse when the conflict with our internal motivational sources is added to the threatening situations and increased demands. Simply put, to do more of what we enjoy or to do less of what we don't enjoy will never present a problem to our motivation profile. Unfortunately, most of us fit the category “I need to do more of what I don't enjoy and less of what I do enjoy.” Truly, a pity...

Finally, if you have difficulty “reading yourself” or understanding others' emotions, pay attention, as the following characteristics will allow you to confirm whether you are facing a case of “*dangerun stressum*,” either your own or someone else's:

- Constant loss of concentration, hyper-sensibility and a sensation of being out of control
- Obsessive search for the truth (to be clear: our own)
- Being isolated, with a sensation of being lost

Let's examine some recommendations that may help us to deal with stressful situations:

- **Recognize that we are in a stressful situation**

Frequently, under strong pressure, we tend to exaggerate our behaviors. For instance, if empathy is our asset, we will rescue everybody that crosses our path when facing stress. If we are analytical, the only way to work in stressing situations is to dissect each ounce of information. We are not aware of our excesses, and worse, we are not aware that we stress everybody around us.

To recognize stress means to be aware of our excesses. Awareness brings the capacity to change behaviors.

- **Take a break, even in stressing environments**

Take a deep breath, take a walk, talk to a colleague, go out to the street and breathe fresh air, take the stairs up for two floors, then down, have a glass of water, each will help immensely. Our body will give us signals that we have to “do something.” There is nothing wrong with telling your co-workers that you



need ten minutes to decompress. Frequently you'll be surprised by their response: "So do we!"

Getting out of the situation is the key to recovering and to helping regain the momentarily lost balance. An analogy is a kettle with boiling water. It never explodes: when it cannot resist any longer to the pressure, it starts to release steam.

- **Find your own answers**

What is causing this deep stress?

What can we change?

What are we going to do to change them?

What cannot be changed?

How does it feel to realize that we cannot change them?

Who can help, at work and away?

Of course, it is much easier to embark on a self-pity journey and convince ourselves that nothing can be changed. Perhaps reflecting on the answers to the questions above will help us to find another path ...

- **Don't fall into cynicism**

The fact that change happens continuously, without help, and its consequences are never measured, provokes serious damages. Chief among them, people become cynical. Cynicism is always corrosive and frequently confused with skepticism. The easiest way to recognize it is when lack of trust abounds: we don't trust our bosses, our peers, nobody, not even ourselves.

Breaking the cynicism cycle is not so simple. The first thing to do is understand what its causes are.

Remember that Susan Boyle will be remembered for two factors: her superb singing skills and her stress attack.

Regardless of your superb skills, how do you want to be remembered?

See you next month. Suggestions are welcome.

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