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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES
CSC 32 / CCEM N° 32

EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS / EXERCICE NOUVEAUX HORIZONS

Leading the Stressed and Depressed

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21 April 2006

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about the mitigation of workplace stress through the application of local level leadership. Workplace stress is an issue within the Canadian Forces (CF) and the Department of National Defence (DND) that can cause health and productivity problems at the individual and workgroup levels. This paper examines the nature of stress, some of its causes, its prevalence within DND, and its impact at both the personal and workgroup level. It argues that a local level leader is in the correct position to recognize and battle the causes and effects of stress within a workgroup, and shows how a local leader can influence up, down and laterally to reduce common stressors and the stress that they cause. Demonstrating how local level leadership can be used to guide and influence both individuals and workgroups to help reduce the causes and impacts of stress, the paper concludes that the effective application of local level leadership can be a powerful tool in the mitigation of workplace stress.

INTRODUCTION

We all experience it, some more than others. It can be positive, or it can be negative. When negative it can be a detriment to our health, productivity and the dynamics of our workgroup. In extreme cases it can even kill us. Workplace stress is a serious issue, and one that needs to be dealt with within the Canadian Forces (CF) and the Department of National Defence (DND).

The CF does recognize the consequences of excessive stress,¹ and there is some direction and a few related programmes in place;² however, most of the current attention is focused on Operational Stress Injuries (OSIs) that impact those involved with CF operations and deployments.³ Workplace stress, i.e. the stress impacting those working in the more static environment of bases, wings and headquarters, is not getting as much attention. Is having stress in the workplace a problem? Considering that “job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not meet the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker,”⁴ workplace stress can indeed be harmful to both the individuals under stress, and to

¹ See for example: Canadian Forces Health Services, “CDS Guidance to Commanding Officers – Chapter 14 – Stress Management,” http://www.forces.gc.ca/health/information/health_promotion/Engraph/StressManagement_e.asp; Internet; accessed 27 February 2006.

² *Ibid.*

³ OSIs are defined as: “...any persistent psychological difficulty resulting from operational duties performed by a Canadian Forces member. The term OSI is used to describe a broad range of problems which usually result in impairment in functioning. OSIs include diagnosed medical conditions such as anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as a range of less severe conditions, but the term OSI is not intended to be used in a medical or legal context.” M.A. L’Heureux and C. Rochon, C.H.R.P., C.M.C., *Canadian Forces and Operational Stress Injuries Efforts and Progress in Addressing the Issues Discussion Paper*, Report Prepared for the Director Human Resources Research and Evaluation (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2004), 11.

⁴ United States, Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 99-101, *STRESS ...at Work*, available from <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html>; Internet; accessed 16 January 2006.

outputs that they produce for and within their workgroups. So what can be done; who can help mitigate the problem?

The CF has leaders and managers at all levels of the organization from the executive branches to the shop floors. Leaders at all levels can both create and help mitigate negative workplace stress, but local leaders, i.e. those that are close enough to an affected workgroup to actually monitor and interact with them on a regular basis down to the individual level, are in a unique position of influence when it comes to the issue. This paper will assert that the effective application of local level leadership can be a powerful tool in the mitigation of workplace stress.

The paper will begin by defining stress and the effects that it can have on the body and individual. It will go on to demonstrate that workplace stress is a problem within the CF/DND that needs to be addressed. The CF's main formal direction and programmes for stress mitigation will then be introduced, noting that the current CF effort is focused more towards the mitigation and treatment of operational vice workplace stress, and that it falls upon leaders to help fill in the gaps. The paper will then cover a number of areas where local level leaders can become real stress mitigators, and conclude that the effective application of local level leadership can make a real difference at the individual and workgroup level.

What is stress; where does it come from and what can it do? Stress can be defined as:

... the internal physiological or psychological responses that result from demanding situations (stressors). Examples of responses include

headaches, gastro-intestinal problems, muscle tension (assuming no known physiological cause), and irritability,⁵

with stressors being “... the external situations demanding change.”⁶ The *Encyclopedia of Stress* states that: “[s]tress may be defined as a real or interpreted threat to the physiological or psychological integrity of an individual that results in physiological and/or behavioural responses.”⁷ Or for a more laymen’s definition: stress is “the body’s non-specific adaptive response to any stimulus or demand.”⁸ Descriptions that all indicate that stress is caused by external sources, and that stress manifests itself as real mental and physical changes to one’s person. This manifestation can be either positive or negative for the individual, as stress, for example, prepares the body for the immediate fight or flight required in the case of danger,⁹ whereas long-term or cumulative stress can cause serious health issues.¹⁰

Both stressors and stress can be classified as either short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic).¹¹ Acute stressors “have a specific time onset ..., are typically of short duration, are of high intensity, and have a low frequency.”¹² Chronic stressors “have no

⁵ CF Health Services, “CDS Guidance to COs – Chapter 14 ...”.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Bruce S. McEwen, “Stress, Definitions and Concepts of,” in *Encyclopedia of Stress VOLUME 3*, ed. George Fink, 508-509 (New York: Academic Press, 2000), 508.

⁸ Department of National Defence, R-PM-066-000/PG-Z00 *A Supervisor’s Guide to Managing Stress* (Winnipeg: CFTMPC, 1994), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7, 8.

¹¹ Harvey Simon MD., “Stress,” *Well-Connected Reports* September 2001. [reports on-line]; available from <http://www.reutershealth.com/wellconnected/doc31.html>; Internet; accessed 16 January 2006.

¹² Kevin E. Kelloway Ph.D. and Lori Francis Ph.D., *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*. Report Prepared for the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (Kingston: n.p., 2003), 2-3.

specific onset, may be of short or long duration, repeat frequently and may be of either low or high intensity.”¹³ One important fact when it comes to stress, is that no matter the cause or type of stressor, the body goes through the same stress response of alarm, followed by resistance, and if the stress continues past the body’s ability to resist, exhaustion.¹⁴ These three phases (known as the Hans Selye Model of General Adaptation Syndrome) are well explained in the CDS guidance to Commanding Officers as taken from the Canadian Forces Health Services (CFHS) website:

Phase 1. An *Alarm Reaction* occurs when the body is required to adapt to an external demand. Typically, during this phase a person’s ability to resist the stress is temporarily reduced (shock) followed by a flight, fight or freeze reaction (counter shock).

Phase 2. During the *Resistance Stage*, the person tries using all internal resources to adapt to the stress. If the stress continues, the resources deplete and the ability to adapt decays.

Phase 3. During the *Exhaustion Phase*, the person’s internal resources are so depleted that the ability to resist stress fails. This can be defined as decompensation. Individuals who decompensate are psychological casualties. This model suggests that effectiveness in dealing with stress tends to peak early during the resistant stage and can be sustained for a significant length of time. Without attending to the unit and individual variable, stress resistance decays, resulting in an increased psychological casualty rate.¹⁵

During the initial phases, the body’s physiological reaction includes the following changes:

CHANGE	EXPLANATION
Heart and Blood	- Oxygen consumption increases - Blood pressure and heart rate increase

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ National Defence, *A Supervisors Guide to Managing Stress*, 5; and J.O. Wyspianski Ph. D. and J.J. Waselnuk M.Ps., *A Comprehensive Stress Management Manual*, Prepared for the Department of Preventative Medicine of the Canadian Forces (Ottawa: n.p., 1985), 8-10.

¹⁵ CF Health Services, “CDS Guidance to COs – Chapter 14 ...”.

CHANGE	EXPLANATION
	- The amount of blood pumped by the heart increases
Metabolism	- Increases - Sugar from the bloodstream and fat from tissues burn off rapidly in order to supply additional energy
Stomach, Intestine	Activity is reduced in order to slow down digestion and food consumption
Blood Composition	Blood clots more easily in order to prevent excessive bleeding
Salivary Glands	Cease functioning
Sweat Glands	Become hyperactive
Pupils of the Eyes	Dilate

Source: Department of National Defence, "A Supervisor's Guide to Managing Stress," 4.

One can see that chronic stressors that keep pushing an individual through the three phases of the Hans Selye Model, and forcing his body through the various physiological and psychological responses, can have very negative effects on that individual. Stress effects that can lead to a number of serious physical and mental conditions from hypertension and heart-attack to burnout.¹⁶

The literature provides numerous sources of workplace stress that could be applicable in various degrees within areas of DND. These sources include: workload; work schedule; time pressures; physical working conditions; external perception (of the CF); job demands versus job control; lack of communication and/or feedback; lack of

¹⁶ National Defence, *A Supervisors Guide to Managing Stress*, 12-13; and Burnout is defined as: "a psychological syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy which is experienced in response to chronic job stressors." Christina Maslach, "Burnout," in *Encyclopedia of Stress VOLUME 1*, ed. George Fink, 358-362 (New York: Academic Press, 2000), 358.

recognition/rewards; poor management; career concerns; poor work-life balance; ambiguous work roles; and poor support networks, just to name a few.¹⁷

Is workplace stress a problem within DND? According to the 2001 Work-Life Balance Study and the 2002 CF Mental Health Survey it certainly is. For example the 2001 Work-Life Balance Study found that:

A relatively high proportion of the employees at DND appear to be having difficulties coping with the stresses associated with work In the six months prior to the study being conducted, 60% of the respondents saw a physician because they were sick; one in three sought other types of care, 30% had medical tests; 10% saw a mental health professional and 15% evaluated their health as poor. ...

With respect to employee mental health, approximately half of those in the DND sample report high levels of perceived stress; one in four are at high risk of burnout and 30% report high levels of depressed mood.¹⁸

The 2002 Statistics Canada CF Mental Health Survey then discovered that depression was a major issue within the CF noting that: “about eight in 100 members of the Regular Force [i.e. a rate nearly twice that of the Canadian general population] and four in 100 Reservists will suffer a major depressive illness at some point in the course of a year.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Kelloway and Francis, *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*, 5-6, 9; Wyspianski, *A Comprehensive Stress Management Manual*, 144-160; National Defence, *A Supervisors Guide to Managing Stress*, 19, 21; Simon, “Stress,”; Linda Duxbury Ph.D., Chris Higgins Ph.D., and Daren L. Johnson M.M.S., *An Examination of the Implications and Costs of Work-Life Conflict in Canada*, Report Prepared for the Public Health Agency of Canada, Available from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/duxbury_e.html; Internet; accessed 27 February 2006; and Canadian Mental Health Association – Richmond Branch, “Sources of Workplace Stress,” <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/rmdcmha/sources2.html>; Internet; accessed 16 January 2006.

¹⁸ L. Duxbury Ph.D. and Chris Higgins Ph.D., *The 2001 Work-Life Balance Study: Key Findings at the Department of Defence [sic] (DND)*, Report Prepared for the Director Human Resources Research and Evaluation (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2002), 14.

¹⁹ Statistics Canada, *Statistics Canada CF Mental Health Survey: A “Milestone”*, available from http://www.forces.gc.ca/health/information/op_health/stats_can/engraph/MH_Survey_e.asp; Internet; accessed 16 March 2006.

An important point to note is that depression is normally closely linked to stress.²⁰

Therefore, as the two examples indicate, at least some areas of DND are suffering from workplace stress to a point that it's negatively impacting people, work and families.

DND is trying to tackle stress on a couple of fronts, but seems more focused on operational vice workplace stress. For example, the *Canadian Forces Administrative Orders* (CFAOs) has one CFAO (34-55) on the *Management of Critical Incident Stress in the Canadian Forces*, and nothing on general stress. The CF has also established five Operational Trauma and Stress Support Centres (OTSSCs) that members can be formally referred to for help with Operational Stress Injuries.²¹ The *CDS Guidance to Commanding Officers* has a chapter on stress management, and while this chapter provides some general information on stress, it tends to focus on operational stress and leads the reader to the Canadian Forces Health Services for more information, where again one finds much more on operational stress and OSI than on workplace stress.²² For more general stress issues there is a seemingly little known 1994 publication titled *A Supervisor's Guide to Managing Stress*,²³ and the CF has just recently started a programme titled *Stress: Take Charge!* as an eight module workshop to help members with their stress hardiness.²⁴ An unfortunate fact remains though, that mental illness,

²⁰ For further information on the depression/stress linkage see: Keith Matthews, "Depression Models," in *Encyclopedia of Stress VOLUME 1*, ed. George Fink, 675-682 (New York: Academic Press, 2000), 677; Health Canada, *Best Advice on Stress Risk Management in the Workplace – Part 1*, available from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/work-travail/stress-part-1/index_e.html; Internet; accessed 16 January 2006; Statistics Canada, *CF Mental Health Survey...*; and Duxbury, Higgins, and Johnson, *An Examination of the Implications and Costs of Work-Life Conflict in Canada*.

²¹ Statistics Canada, *CF Mental Health Survey...*

²² CF Health Services, "CDS Guidance to COs – Chapter 14 ...,".

²³ National Defence, *A Supervisors Guide to Managing Stress*.

²⁴ Statistics Canada, *CF Mental Health Survey...*

stress and burnout still have a stigma attached to them,²⁵ and many will not seek help or take advantage of what may be available to them for that very reason.²⁶ With a seeming emphasis on Operational Stress Injuries, and a stigma associated with recognizing, admitting, and receiving treatment for general workplace stress and its consequences, DND members suffering from workplace stress may feel on their own, and it falls to local leaders to try to make a difference.

How can local leaders make a difference? Leaders exercise leadership, a term which can be defined as: “directly or indirectly influencing others, by means of formal authority or personal attributes, to act in accordance with one’s intent or a shared purpose.”²⁷ The ability of a local leader to effectively exert influence upwards, downwards and laterally is one very important factor that allows them to mitigate workplace stress. Another important characteristic of a local leader is that they are close enough to the workgroup to be able to maintain good situational awareness with respect to its inputs, outputs, health and morale. A third important factor is that the local leader can become close to and knowledgeable of the individual members of the workgroup helping in the formation of trust and teamwork relations.

A leader’s role with respect to workplace stress can be either positive or negative depending on leadership style and technique. A leader should be able to judge and use appropriate challenge as a motivator without causing chronic workplace stress. It must be understood that the CF leadership doctrine considers “mission success” to be the

²⁵ Statistics Canada, *CF Mental Health Survey...*; and Duxbury and Higgins, *Work-Life Balance Study: Key Findings...*, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000/AP-003 *Leadership in the Canadian Forces – Doctrine* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), 3.

normal outcome of primary importance,²⁸ and that to achieve the mission may at times, depending on importance and circumstance, require considerable short-term stress to be placed upon those enabling it. This should not however be allowed to become a chronic workplace stressor. A good leader will also recognize that his stress tolerance may be different (e.g. higher) than that of his followers, and take this into account when judging and monitoring levels of stress.²⁹

Poor leaders can be stressors as well. For example, abusive leaders in formal positions of authority who “engage in aggressive or punitive behaviours toward their employees” can be a serious source of workplace stress.³⁰ Passive leaders who rely on laissez-faire and management-by-exception can also be a source of increased workplace stress.³¹ Controlling leaders who strictly limit the amount of discretion and control that employees have over the way they do their tasks can be but a third type of workplace stressor.³² Those who practice, or are perceived to practice, organizational injustice will also see an increase in workplace stress,³³ to name a few.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁹ Lynn R. Offermann and Peta S. Hellmann, “Leadership Behavior and Subordinate Stress: A 360° View,” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 1996, Vol 1, No. 4: 382-390; <http://www.epnet.com/>; Internet; accessed 28 February 2006.

³⁰ E. Kevin Kelloway, *et al*, “Poor Leadership,” in *Handbook of Work Stress*, ed. Julian Barling, E. Kevin Kelloway, and Michael R. Frone, 89-112 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc. 2005), 91.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 92; and John J. Sosik and Veronica M. Godshalk, “Leadership Styles, Mentoring Functions Received, and Job-Related Stress: A Conceptual Model and Preliminary Study,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (June 2000): 365-390; <http://www.jstor.org>; Internet; accessed 22 February 2006.

³² Offermann and Hellmann, “A 360° View ...”.

³³ Russell Cropanzano, Barry M. Goldman, and Lehman Benson III, “Organizational Justice,” in *Handbook of Work Stress*, ed. Julian Barling, E. Kevin Kelloway, and Michael R. Frone, 63-88 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc. 2005), 63, 81.

One of the first ways that local leaders can work to reduce stress is by ensuring that both they and those around them are using appropriate leadership techniques. Styles of leadership shown effective in reducing stress include “contingent reward” and “transformational” leadership,³⁴ both being key components of the CF leadership model,³⁵ with transformational leadership being considered the preferred style for stress relief in the workplace.³⁶ If an inappropriate leadership style is being employed, a local leader can try to influence the offending party to adjust his or her style or methods to reduce the stress being generated.

Much more than simply ensuring appropriate leadership style, the local level leader is in a good position to observe and influence a number of workgroup stressors and stress related areas. One of the key things that a local level leader is in a position to do is to monitor the workgroup on a regular basis to ensure that stress is kept at a reasonable level. He can watch for areas and personnel with apparent problems, and work to determine if the problems are real, what their apparent causes are, and attempt to

³⁴ For details on why these styles are effective see: Sosik and Godshalk, “Leadership Styles, Mentoring Functions Received, and Job-Related Stress...,”; E. Kevin Kelloway, “The Healthy Workplace: Some New Thinking about an Old Issue,” *The Workplace Review* (April 2005) [journal on-line]; available from <http://sobey.smu.ca/workplacereview/april2005/WPR2.post.pdf>; Internet; accessed 28 February 2006; Kelloway and Francis, *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*, 36-37; and Kelloway, *et al*, “Poor Leadership,” 92.

³⁵ National Defence, *Leadership ... Doctrine*, 21-24.

³⁶ Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000/AP-004 *Leadership in the Canadian Forces – Conceptual Foundations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2005), 69; Sosik and Godshalk, “Leadership Styles, Mentoring Functions Received, and Job-Related Stress...,”; Kelloway, “The Healthy Workplace,”; Kelloway and Francis, *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*, 36-37; and Kelloway, *et al*, “Poor Leadership,” 92.

influence solutions. Dealing closely with the workgroup, he can also work to increase teamwork and trust, two major items known to help in workplace stress reduction.³⁷

Excessive workload is often identified as one of the prime stressors in the workplace.³⁸ As a trusted champion of his workgroup with an appropriate and recognized situational awareness of the current workload and its effects on the group, a local leader is in a good position to work with and influence the various managers, workgroup superiors, and clients to try to ensure that the workload demands are reasonable. This can effectively be a two way process as the local leader can work to influence both externally and internally to try to ensure a manageable workload/output understood and accepted by all.

It has been noted that higher level managers and leaders, especially those at, or trying to reach, the Executive or General Officer level, are typically driven high achievers, who work long hours, have strong resistance to stress, and can produce considerable workload and stress for those below them.³⁹ As the higher levels may lack suitable situational awareness of what's actually happening at, and the impact of their actions on, the lower levels, local leaders are the workgroup's first line of defence, communication and feedback to the various higher levels of command when the workload demands become unreasonable.⁴⁰ As DND is a hierarchical organization, it is

³⁷ Offermann and Hellmann, "A 360° View ...,"; and National Defence, *Leadership ... Conceptual Foundations*, 73.

³⁸ Duxbury and Higgins, *Work-Life Balance Study: Key Findings...*, 6, 8, 16; and Kelloway and Francis, *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*, 5, 9.

³⁹ R.G. Dickinson, "Workplace Well-being in DND – Starting at the Top," (Toronto: Canadian Forces College National Security Studies Course Paper, 2003), 9, 21.

⁴⁰ Kelloway and Francis, *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*, 25.

also important for the local leader to articulate the goals and vision of the higher levels, to ensure that the workgroup is actually focusing on the right things and not stressing itself unwarrantedly. It has been noted that understanding and working under a strong common vision can reduce the impact of stress on a workgroup;⁴¹ however, it does not necessarily reduce the impact of individual stress as workers can sacrifice self for the common vision.⁴² This is something that the local leader must remain vigilant for, and again is at the correct level to do so.

To keep a handle on the required workload and to provide a worker a measure of how much is enough, it is important that a worker's roles and responsibilities are well defined.⁴³ Personal observation and experience shows that job creep is quite evident within DND, and there is often a mismatch between what a position/role is formally responsible for and what the member in that position/role actually takes on and does. Keeping job descriptions and terms of reference realistic, up to date, and known, is a task that tends to fall by the wayside when people are busy. Defining a member's roles and responsibilities, monitoring progress and providing feedback gives the member a required framework in which to work, and ensures that the supervisor also remains cognisant and involved in what's going on. Local leadership is both important and appropriate to ensure that all of the required actions take place so that roles, responsibilities and expectations are properly understood.

⁴¹ ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership, "Surviving Real World Stress," <http://www.centeronline.org/knowledge/article.cfm?ID=646&ContentProfileID=122499&Action=searching>; Internet; accessed 1 March 2006.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ NIOSH, *STRESS ...at Work*.

Directly influencing the workgroup dynamics to balance internal workload and to foster increased teamwork is another area that the local leader is in a best position to accomplish. In addition to workload, another area known to produce workplace stress are high demand / low control tasks where the workers must produce but have little leeway in how the task is done.⁴⁴ As illustrated by the Karasek Demand-Control Model,⁴⁵ most people are less stressed when they have a reasonable degree of control over their tasks. The local leader is in a very good position to know how much control can and should be delegated to the members of the workgroup to allow them the optimum flexibility and ownership of the tasks to help reduce the associated stress. Significant changes in responsibility would of course require a period of monitoring and feedback; however, communications and feedback, especially in a relationship of trust, is another known stress reducer.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Duxbury, Higgins, and Johnson, *An Examination of the Implications and Costs of Work-Life Conflict in Canada*; and Canadian Mental Health Association, “Sources of Workplace Stress.”

⁴⁵ [Professor Robert] Karasek (1979) developed a well-known model [shown below] ... to illustrate the relationships between control, demand, and distress or job strain. According to this model, two conditions are associated with distress. The most distressing condition (“high strain”) occurs when high job demands are combined with low control (lower left quadrant of the model). High job strain, he claims, is typical of such occupations as waiter, assembly line worker, and keypuncher, where a high level of output is demanded, but employees have little or no decision latitude as to how the job is performed The second most distressing condition occurs when control is low, but so are the work demands (lower right quadrant). These jobs Karasek labels as “passive”, as they are typically those which required little more than routine responses to the environment such as the jobs held by billing clerks, janitors and security guards.”; Duxbury, Higgins, and Johnson, *An Examination of the Implications and Costs of Work-Life Conflict in Canada*.

Karasek Demand-Control Model			
		Demands	
		High	Low
Control	High	Moderate Strain	Low Strain
	Low	High Strain	Moderate-High Strain

Source: Public Health Agency of Canada, “An Examination of the Implications and Costs of Work-Life Conflict in Canada”

⁴⁶ ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership, “Surviving Real World Stress.”

While monitoring and influencing the workgroup dynamics and encouraging communications, the local leader can also be encouraging openness and acceptance within the group. Being close to the group, he is in a good position for success. Communications, openness and acceptance provide a number of positive features with respect to stress mitigation. They assist in the timely recognition and acceptance of problems (which is important for early resolution before the situation escalates into issues such as absenteeism, depression or burnout). They also assist in the formation of workgroup support networks for those who need them. Properly promoting acceptance and openness also helps reduce the stigma associated with stress related issues, which is especially important for anyone considering either formal help or are returning to the group after a stress related absence.⁴⁷

Influencing others to adjust their perception and outlook on their work, their health, their priorities, and the people around them, is an area that the local leader is also in a good position to tackle when and where required. Correctly influencing people's outlook on their work, health and priorities, helps those individuals plan and cope with job stressors and their effects. Positively influencing people's outlook on others can help in a number of ways. A leader can target negative perceptions and feelings being held against someone who is suffering from stress and considered to be either weak, or a detriment to the workgroup (either of which can add to the stressors on, and the stigma felt by, the individual).⁴⁸ The leader can also work to influence the perceptions of an

⁴⁷ E.K. Kelloway Ph.D., *et al*, *Psychological Disorders in the CF Legal and Social Issues*, Report Prepared for the Director Human Resources Research and Evaluation (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2004), 25, 27, 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

individual experiencing stress, to ensure that the individual has a true and realistic view of the situation, and of the abilities, feelings, etc of their co-workers, to try to remove the additional stressors on an individual who may be perceiving themselves overly different, inadequate or isolated.

Promoting and fostering workgroup, and larger, support networks is an important leadership task.⁴⁹ Those experiencing stress need such networks to act as stress buffers and assist in their coping.⁵⁰ Local leaders/supervisors are considered a “particularly potent source of social support,”⁵¹ and like with OSIs, where casualties respond better who are kept close to their units at the front,⁵² “empirical evidence supports a congruence hypothesis whereby support is most effective when it emerges from the same domain as the stressor.”⁵³ Or more simply put, workplace stress can be better understood, buffered and mitigated by those close to the issue at work. Buffering and support networks are needed, and when local leaders/supervisors fail to provide expected stress buffering and support, they are often regarded poorly with a resulting loss of respect and trust.⁵⁴

Dealing closely with the individuals within the workgroup, a local leader is in a good situation to monitor and judge individual job fit and job mismatch. Job mismatch is an area that can produce heavy stress leading to burnout. Indeed, “... the greater the gap,

⁴⁹ National Defence, *Leadership ... Conceptual Foundations*, 81, 84.

⁵⁰ Kelloway and Francis, *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*, 34-35.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵² CF Health Services, “CDS Guidance to COs – Chapter 14 ...”.

⁵³ Kelloway and Francis, *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*, 35.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

or mismatch, between the person and the job, the greater the likelihood of burnout.”⁵⁵

Although when dealing with military members, the member’s rank, trade or classification, and formal qualifications are suppose to qualify/match them for a job, people are still individuals who handle stressors differently, and not all people can be comfortably matched with every job. In addition to knowing and monitoring his people, the local leader is also in the correct position to influence the mentoring, training and assignment of personnel to alleviate job mismatches and other such areas causing job related stress.

Workplace training is an important issue that often gets overlooked or dropped under the time crunch of heavy workload and looming deadlines. Necessary training provides workers a number of the skills required to cope with their jobs. Other training, like that now provided though programmes such as *Stress: Take Charge!*, provides select individuals necessary life skills to help mitigate personal stress. Select training can also provide a reward, bonus or break for an employee. For some, being sent on course will be seen as an added stressor to an already busy schedule, but local leadership can be used to ensure a correct and positive view. The other area that appropriate leadership is required is within a stressed workgroup that perceives that having people away on training is a catastrophic event that negatively impacts either the group as a whole, or select individuals within. Leaders close to the situation are in the best position to judge the requirements, risks and rewards of the training, in the context of any short-term stress produced, and to guide and influence accordingly.

⁵⁵ Maslach, “Burnout,” 361.

Workplace injustice, either real or perceived, is a stressor in the workplace.⁵⁶ If workplace injustice is indeed happening, the local leader should be in a good position to know and to intervene at the immediate level, as well as trying to influence outside his current sphere as appropriate. If it is only perceived, then the local leader is again in the correct position, one that should include the trust and authority to work both up and down the chain, to try to prove the perception to be false and mitigate the stress being caused.

Career expectations and career development is another area that can cause stress in a number of people.⁵⁷ The stressors can come from many areas such as missed training opportunities, perceived injustice, job dissatisfaction / job mismatch, lack of rewards, etc. As the local level dealing with higher on the career development of individuals, the local leader is well placed to talk to the individuals, learn of and recognize problem areas, and guide solutions. Depending on the relationship established between the leader and the individual, the leader may become a mentor, confidant and/or advisor and ease the stressors surrounding career issues.

A caring organization and/or a considerate leader are important factors in reducing workplace stress.⁵⁸ A local leader is in a good position to be the considerate leader and promote the caring organization. Proper work-life balance is one of the goals espoused by DND, but not one necessarily embraced by all in the organization.⁵⁹ To

⁵⁶ Cropanzano, Goldman, and Benson, "Organizational Justice," 63, 81.

⁵⁷ Kelloway, *et al*, "Poor Leadership," 97-98.

⁵⁸ Tzvetanka Dobрева-Martinova, *et al*, "Occupational Role Stress in the Canadian Forces: Its Association With Individual and Organizational Well-Being," *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 2002, Vol 34, No. 2: 111-121; <http://www.epnet.com/>; Internet; accessed 27 February 2006; and Kelloway and Francis, *Stress: Definitions, Interventions and the Role of Leaders*, 35.

⁵⁹ Duxbury and Higgins, *Work-Life Balance Study: Key Findings...*, 10-12, 16.

reach a reasonable work-life balance, members must believe that it is an acceptable practice, and leaders must work towards that aim both as champions and role models. Being close to the workgroup, and being the interface with higher levels of leadership and management, the local leader is the point that can promote, monitor and defend work-life balance both within and for the workgroup.

Promoting healthy lifestyle as a buffer against stress is another area where the local leader can excel. Being close to and known by the personnel in the workgroup, the local leader can influence the members to work to build their stress resilience on a regular basis. The unique position of the leader with respect to the workgroup allows him the required latitude to set rules, goals and schedules to allow the time and opportunity for things such as fitness activities and other known stress relievers. Getting those most in need to participate may be a leadership challenge, but working in close contact with these individuals increases the chance for success.

Knowing the people, the workplace and its dynamics, and holding a position of trust and influence, the local leader is in a good position to encourage professional help where warranted. Many suffering stress will not truly recognize it for the potential problems it can represent and won't seek help early enough if at all. The local leader is in a position to monitor and intervene, and has the duty to do so where required.⁶⁰ Leadership is also required to ensure the acceptance of professional help by the individual, as well as ensuring the understanding and acceptance of the situation by the workgroup as necessary. Working to remove the stigma of actually using the available resources is an important task that the local leader is also in a good position to

⁶⁰ National Defence, *A Supervisors Guide to Managing Stress*, 44-45; and CF Health Services, "CDS Guidance to COs – Chapter 14 ...".

accomplish, as he is close to the individual, the workgroup, and can also monitor and influence perceptions along the chain as required.

In working to mitigate stress, the local leader must ensure that he looks after himself as well. Influencing material stressors is one thing, but trying to influence individuals towards more healthy habits, using available resources, etc, in a do as I say not as I do setting is extremely difficult. A leader experiencing moderate to heavy workplace stress may tend to focus inward vice outward and not provide the necessary quality leadership to the workgroup. Local leadership happens at all levels, and it may require the intervention of a level up to guide or assist a leader who is experiencing problems.

The positive effects of stress mitigation through local leadership are fairly intuitive but should be stated. Local leadership intervention in removing or lessening personal stressors will have a positive impact at the individual level, and show a caring and supportive attitude while leading to a healthier, and hence happier and more productive employee. At the workgroup level, the leadership intervention will help built trust, teamwork, positively shape workgroup dynamics, and help build respect and confidence in the leader as a workgroup champion. This also leads to a happier, healthier, more productive, and stress resilient workplace. The local level leader is in the best position to exert his leadership skills to make all this happen and be a champion mitigator of workplace stress.

CONCLUSION

Workplace stress is a problem within the CF/DND that is recognized but is not being fully dealt with. It is a problem that can literally impact the health, lives, and wellbeing of our people and their families. It is an issue that leadership at the local level can and should address.

Local level leaders are in the best position to monitor, influence and protect their workgroups against workplace stressors. They can influence up, across, and down the chain of command to reduce stress resulting from inappropriate leadership and management. They're in the correct position to regularly monitor the workgroup and its members for stress while building an environment of teamwork, trust and support. They are in the right position to monitor and judge workload stresses and to influence the managers, the clients, and the internal processes as necessary to alleviate problems. The local leader is also in the best position to know his people and their capabilities, and can work to increase their control over their own tasks as required.

Fostering understanding, communications, openness, and feedback are other stress reduction strategies that the local leader is in an excellent position to accomplish. He is also positioned to remedy job mismatch, workplace injustice, training and career issues. When and where necessary he is also at the right level to influence individuals towards stress reducing lifestyle changes, or professional assistance as required. In short, the effective application of local level leadership can be a powerful tool in the mitigation of workplace stress.

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