

Stress -- The second in our series discussing the 13 tendencies in our reports.

Stress --In a previous eblast, we explained how a person's emotional energy could be equated to the size of vehicle's engine. Like an engine provides the energy to move a vehicle, emotional energy is what drives humans' behaviors and enables them to deal with the resistance they encounter in living their lives. That resistance is what we refer to as stress in our hiring and coaching reports. Stress can be thought of as a measurement of how well our 'engine' (level of emotional energy) allows us to continue functioning effectively against the resistance we meet every day of our lives.

So, what part does stress play in the workplace? Since we are using allegories, lets compare jobs to the oil that is used to keep an engine running effectively. If the right motor oil is used, it reduces the friction and lets the engine easily keep the vehicle moving. But, if the wrong oil is used, the engine eventually becomes less effective at moving the vehicle down the road. If people are not suited to a particular job, it becomes more difficult to remain effective as they have to shift their emotional energy from meeting life's challenges to holding themselves together in order to continue working.

And, just like an engine can be damaged by the wrong oil, a person's health can be damaged by prolonged stress created by trying to do a job for which they are not suited. One of the first stories I ever heard after being introduced to the survey was of a beloved employee who was retiring after 20 years service to one company. Speaking at his retirement dinner, his first comment was, "I never wanted to be a manager." Yet, he had been a manager for over 15 years with this company but was never able to tell anyone of his dissatisfaction of performing this role. I might add his early retirement was caused by numerous medical conditions related to stress.

The amount of stress an individual is experiencing in their life is not very important on its own but the relationship between stress and their level of emotional energy is critical in determining the likelihood of someone being successful in a situation. Everyone has a certain level of stress they can comfortably handle but too little or too much can be detrimental.

People with low stress are generally very 'laid back' and easy to get along with but they also can be very frustrating to employers. Their low stress can be an indication that they are not interested in becoming engaged in meeting life's challenges. In other words, they prefer to just 'cruise down the highway of life' without having to negotiate too many bumps. They may have a lot of potential but choose to not strive in order to achieve it and, regardless of how much coaching or mentoring an employer provides, it is doubtful that they will change. We may never fire this person but we are never completely satisfied with them either.

Then there is the person who is experiencing too much stress in their lives. The more emotional energy they have, the more stress they can handle but too much stress for too long is never a good thing. Everyone experiences a certain amount of stress in their personal life as well as their professional life. Someone with a stressful job needs to be able to go home each day and 'recharge their battery' so that they can handle the workplace pressure. But, a person who has a stressful job and a stressful personal life does not have the opportunity to rest and recover their energy. This person is either going to have to have enough down time during the workday to rest and recover or they are going to eventually 'crash and burn'.

Surveys of potential hires show that there are many people who are experiencing a higher than normal level of stress in their lives. Often, this stress is the result of their inability to deal with people effectively or their inability or unwillingness to change in order to better fit their job requirements.

Continued on Page 2



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Their stress continues to increase until they are ultimately driven to find a new job in order to reduce their stress. We saw an example of this not too long ago when a gentleman who had worked for over 20 years for a large insurance company was terminated due to downsizing. After three jobs in four years following his termination, he was hired by one of our clients but lasted less than one year.

So, what could be the reason that this person could function for 20 years in one company but not be capable of lasting even one year in others? The answer to that question is the level of pressure to perform in the different environments. He had worked well in a more bureaucratic environment where there was little emphasis on being productive. But, he could not handle an environment that required productivity and provided little down time.

If our report identifies a candidate as having high stress and being unable to handle pressure, would they survive for long in a job that was hectic and fast paced? What if they have high emotional energy and enjoyed working at a fast pace? If they were put into a slow paced setting, would they remain satisfied for long? When reading our reports, keep in mind what your work environment is like to help you determine if a potential hire is going to be a good match for your organization.

“The irony is this: Our bodies react to stress in exactly the same way whether or not we have a good reason for being stressed. The body doesn't care if we're right or wrong. Even in those times when we feel perfectly justified in getting angry—when we tell ourselves it's the healthy response—we pay for it just the same.” Doc Childre and Howard Martin

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