

Misconceptions that result in unnecessary stress

As a manager, you probably have an image in mind of your ideal employee. Chances are that you'll want someone who is hard-working, dedicated, not opposed to putting in extra hours, and who follows orders without giving you any lip. The problem is that there are some traits and skills that can appear to be a strength, but are actually a liability, and this can result in a lot of stress for the employee. Here are some examples:

Efficiency

- ❖ **The benefits:** Work gets done quickly, which means productivity increases, clients receive service faster, deadlines are easier to meet, and your bottom line increases. Getting more work done during business hours also means less overtime.
- ❖ **The downside:** The quest for efficiency can go too far. Time crunches put a lot of pressure on employees. Being pressured to get work done faster or within a specific time limit (like in call centers) also increases anxiety, frustration, and stress. This can lead to turnover.



Multitasking

- ❖ **The benefits:** It can increase productivity if one task requires full attention while others can be done on autopilot, like typing while talking on the phone. Multitasking is also useful in project management, particularly if a project is complex and involves a lot of dependencies.
- ❖ **The downside:** Scattered attention results in more omissions, mistakes, and unfinished work. Employees are more likely to make hasty decisions when required to multitask, and are also more likely to waste time transitioning from one task to another - an average of 2 hours per day! Research has also shown that we can only focus effectively on one task at a time. Any other concurrent tasks will not receive the benefits of our full attention (like texting while driving).



Easy access to managers

- ❖ **The benefits:** Employees who trust their manager are more committed and engaged. An empowered staff is a productive staff. It's a win-win situation for the company and the employees. The bottom line is that employees need to be able to turn to their managers when they have questions or concerns. Adopting an "open-door" policy improves the employee-management relationship and morale, and allows for a constant flow of communication.
- ❖ **The downside:** When managers make themselves readily available, it's not just to employees - it means being constantly on call for everyone. This means answering constant questions, calls, and emails, and being the go-to person for every decision and in emergency situations. This forces managers to multitask, which can result in sloppy planning, poor time management, disorganization, and delays. Some managers who are constantly on call find it difficult to relax, which can make them a little snippy sometimes.

Meetings

- ❖ **The benefits:** Whether they consist of progress meetings, budget meetings, or brainstorming sessions, meetings ensure proper planning, keep everyone up-to-date, and are an important part of the problem-solving process (because several heads are often better than one).

- ❖ **The downside:** Let's face it: Aside from being too long, too frequent, and too boring, meetings are a waste of time and resources if not properly organized. An efficient meeting has a clear agenda, a designated leader, clear documentation to help people follow along, a set time limit, breaks if the meeting is long, and the practice of good etiquette (everyone gets a chance to speak, phones are shut off, no interruptions).

Matrix Management

- ❖ **The benefits:** In a matrix structure, employees work with multiple managers. For example: If employee Jon Smith is responsible for coming up with a new ice cream flavor, he'll need to work with the R&D manager to determine which flavor would be the most appealing to the public, the production manager to start producing the new ice cream, and the marketing manager to create attention-grabbing advertising to sell the new ice cream. Working with multiple managers gives John access to a wide range of expertise. This in turn improves his own knowledge and skills. Matrix management also allows for the dynamic creation of project teams with an assortment of strengths and expertise, and makes it easier to find optimal solutions to problems by taking different points of view into account.



- ❖ **The downside:** Too many inputs make it difficult to reach a consensus when a decision needs to be made, and makes it a challenge to monitor the progress of projects. This is aside from the fact that the different managers may disagree or override each other's decisions. Upper management may also find themselves dealing with conflicting loyalties regarding allocation of resources.

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