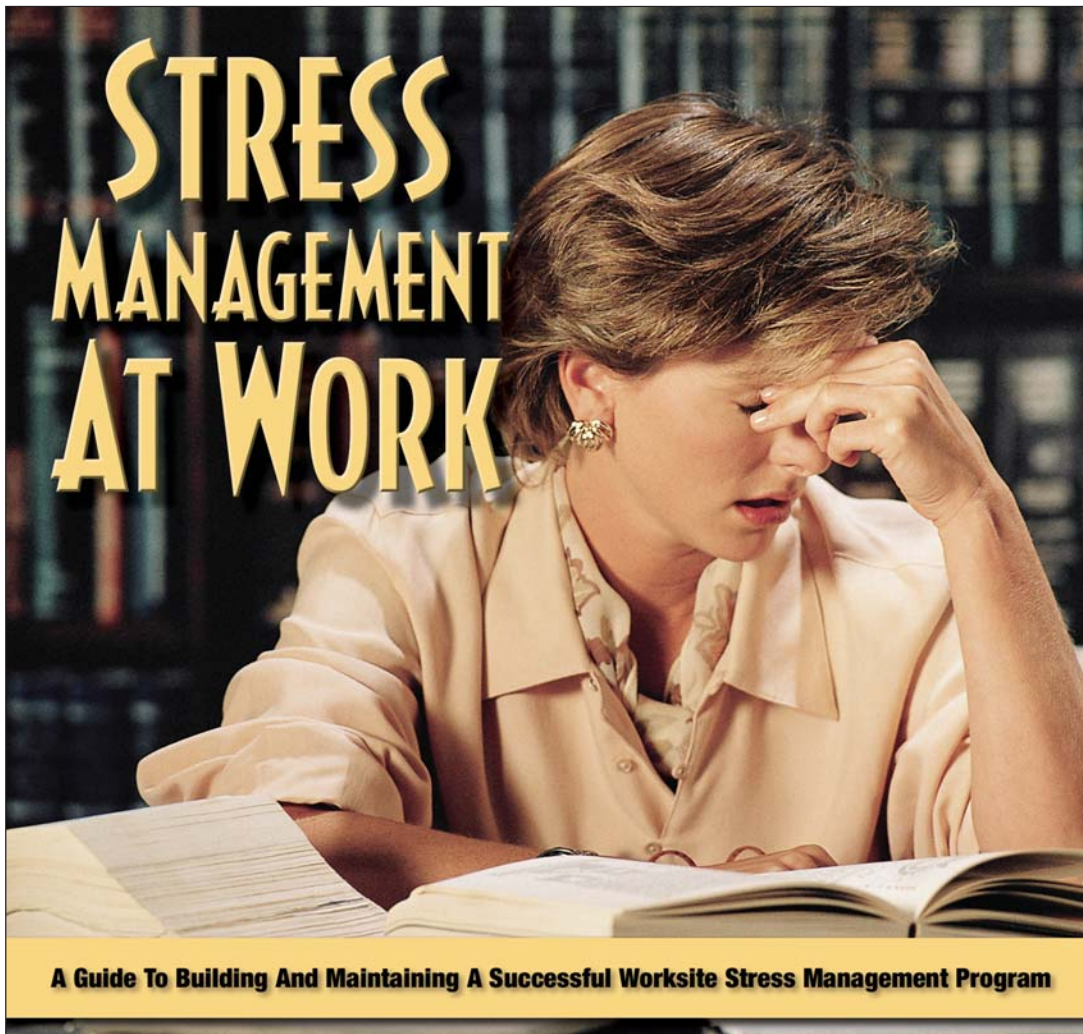


# Absolute ADVANTAGE

THE WORKPLACE WELLNESS MAGAZINE



## STRESS MANAGEMENT AT WORK

**A Guide To Building And Maintaining A Successful Worksite Stress Management Program**



### IN THIS ISSUE:

Workplace stress is a serious issue negatively affecting employee health and putting a damper on business productivity. In recent years, longer work weeks and increasing demands have driven stress levels to all-time highs, and sometimes it seems there may be no end to the madness. This issue of *Absolute Advantage* has been created to help you reduce workplace stress at your organization, improve employee health, and enhance productivity—even in the midst of this modern mayhem.



Each month you can learn more about the articles in *Absolute Advantage*. Simply log on to WELCOA's members only website to get more in-depth coverage of the topics that matter most to you. Find full-length interviews, expert insight, and links to additional information that will help you do your job better!

THE WELLNESS COUNCILS OF AMERICA

Give others in your company the Advantage. Please route to:  Senior Management  Human Resources  Benefits Department  Fitness Center

## From the Executive Editor

Stress has reached new heights in the United States. The convergence of a number of factors—longer work weeks, a sluggish economy, accelerating technology, and the ever-present threat of global terrorism—has begun to take its toll on corporate productivity and the spirit of the American worker. In fact, a recent Gallup Poll indicated that 80 percent of workers feel stress on the job, and nearly half say they need help in learning how to manage stress. In light of these facts, there has never been a better time to develop a proactive worksite stress management program at your organization.

But in today's environment, it's going to take a lot more than stress balls and pep talks to alleviate the strain and tension so familiar to most employees. In a modern business setting, stress management must be taken seriously, and it must be approached with creativity, planning, and true dedication—before the levee breaks.

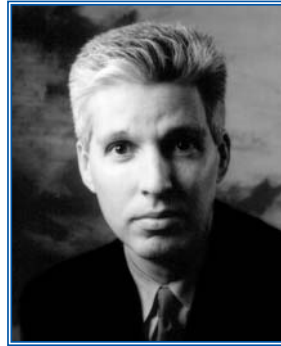
This issue of *Absolute Advantage* is designed to deliver new and intriguing insights into worksite stress management programming. The 50 great ideas included here are real-life examples of programming that works, and they can be implemented right away. We've also included an exclusive interview with stress management expert Brian Luke Seaward, PhD, author of *Stressed is Deserts Spelled Backwards*, which will help you understand the forces at play when attempting to reduce organizational stress. You'll also find a case study demonstrating how one organization saved money as a direct result of helping employees reduce stress and find meaning and purpose in work and life.

No doubt, workplace stress has reached its boiling point, and employee health and continued business prosperity is at stake. It is up to employers to help workers find ways to relax, recharge, and unwind before it's too late. I hope you find this important issue of *Absolute Advantage* to be helpful as you answer this important call.

Best of health,



David Hunnicutt, PhD  
President



David Hunnicutt, PhD

In a modern business setting,  
**stress management must**  
**be taken seriously,**  
**and it must be approached**  
**with creativity, planning,**  
**and true dedication—**  
**before the levee breaks.**

# Absolute ADVANTAGE

THE WORKPLACE WELLNESS MAGAZINE

Organizational Founder, William Kizer, Sr.

## Welcome

*Absolute Advantage* is the interactive workplace wellness magazine that helps large and small employers link health and well-being to business outcomes. *Absolute Advantage* arms business leaders and wellness practitioners with leading-edge workplace wellness information straight from the field's most respected business and health experts.

With its online component, *Absolute Advantage* provides the industry's most current and accurate information. By logging on to the magazine's interactive website, you can access a whole new world of health promotion—including in-depth interviews with national health promotion experts and insider's information about industry products.

### Subscription Information

For information about subscribing to *Absolute Advantage*, contact the Wellness Councils of America at (402) 827-3590 or via e-mail at [wellworkplace@welcoa.org](mailto:wellworkplace@welcoa.org).

### Ab • sol • ute Ad • van • tage:

When a company can produce more than its competitors—even though they have the same amount of resources—it has an absolute advantage. **We believe wellness is that advantage.**

### Executive Editor, David Hunnicutt, PhD

Dr. Hunnicutt is President of the Wellness Councils of America. As a leader in the field of health promotion, his vision has led to the creation of numerous publications designed to link health promotion objectives to business outcomes.

### Vice President of Marketing, Galen Moes

With more than 15 years experience in a Berkshire-Hathaway company, Galen joins WELCOA as Vice President of Marketing and is responsible for developing strategic direction and taking the primary leadership role in marketing all of WELCOA's products and services throughout the US.

### Senior Editor, Mike Perko, PhD

Dr. Perko has significant experience in worksite wellness. Currently an Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Dr. Perko also serves on WELCOA's Medical Advisory Board. He has also served as Associate Director of *Good Health Makes Sense*, in Birmingham, AL.

### Managing Editor, Brittanie Leffelman, MS

Brittanie is the Director of Operations and manages major writing projects at WELCOA. With a Master's Degree in Health Promotion, she regularly coordinates national health forums, major grants, and state and local wellness initiatives.

### Director for Council Affairs, Kelly Stobbe, MEd

As the Director for Council Affairs, Kelly is responsible for leading WELCOA's cadre of locally-affiliated wellness Councils. In this capacity, Kelly coordinates the *Well Workplace* awards initiative as well as the *Well City USA* community health project.

### Director of Design and Technology, Justin Eggspuehler

A 2001 graphic design graduate from Iowa State University, Justin studied design in Rome, Italy before joining the WELCOA design staff. He is responsible for the layout and design of many publications including *The Well Workplace* newsletter and *Absolute Advantage* magazine.

Information in this publication is carefully reviewed for accuracy. Questions, comments, or ideas are welcome. Please direct to Dr. David Hunnicutt, Executive Editor, at the address below.

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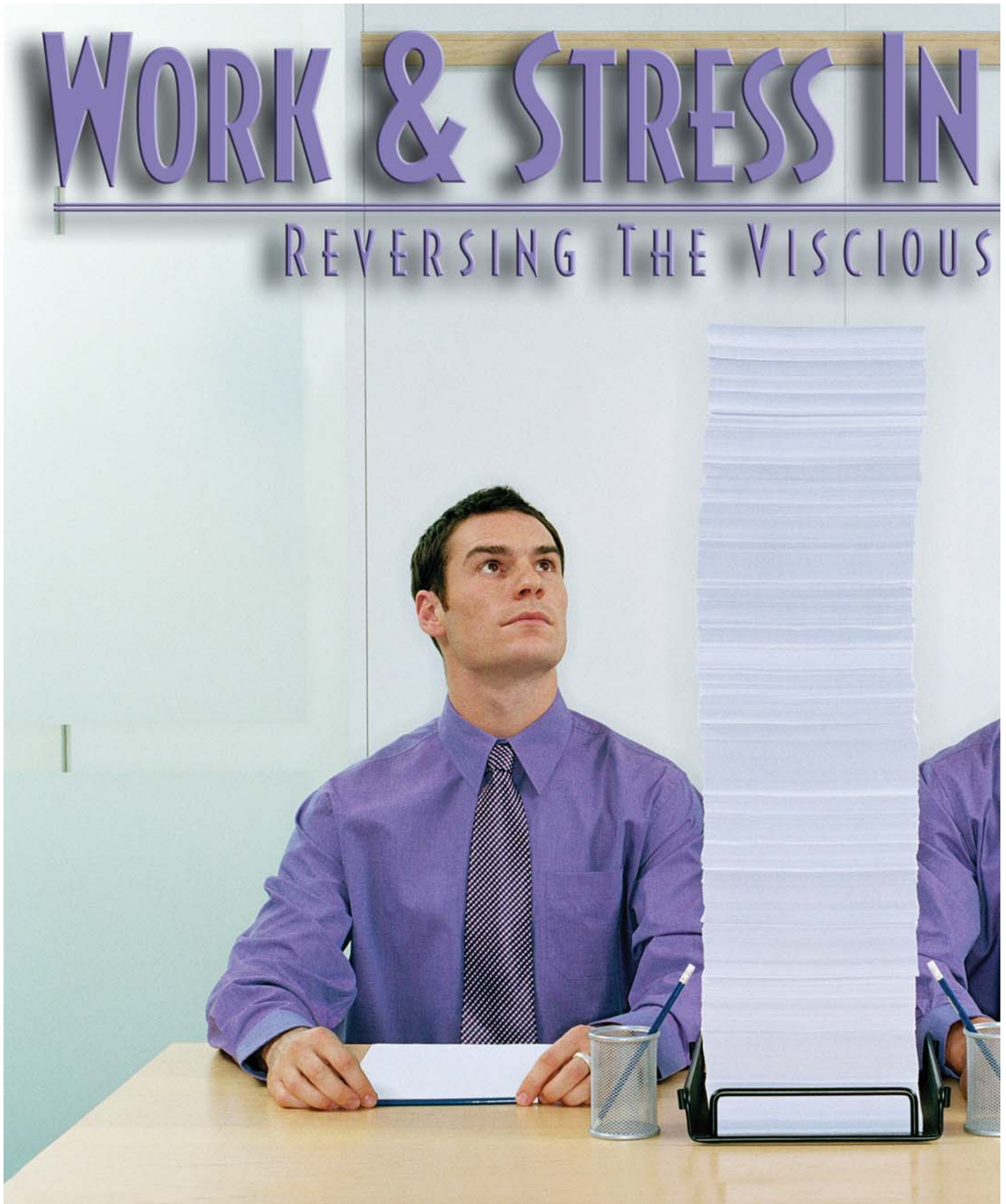
In this exclusive WELCOA interview, stress management expert Brian Luke Seaward, PhD, speaks out on how you can help employees conquer stress and live well during times of uncertainty and rapid change.



# WORK & STRESS IN

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## REVERSING THE VISCIOUS



# AMERICA

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## CYCLE



**It is likely that every American worker in history—no matter what their occupation—has experienced stress in one form or another.**

In the agricultural age, stress was borne from the ever-looming threat of catastrophic weather that would destroy crops and weaken the winter food supply. During the Industrial Revolution, stress was the product of rapidly developing new machinery and techniques that led to a “different way of doing things.” In the information age, technology keeps us connected “24/7” allowing business to boom while overwhelming workers with a never-ending cycle of emails, faxes, and phone calls.

Stress at home is certainly a major issue as well. In two-parent households, oftentimes both parents work long hours, only to come home to care for children and/or elderly parents, pay bills, cook, clean, and find time for each other. Challenges are even more extreme for single parents. The most disheartening part of all? For many workers, the end appears nowhere in sight, and often we lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively counteract or avoid major stressors in our lives.

But what exactly is stress? Although there is no one single definition, many experts in the field of health promotion define stress as “a perceived threat—real or imagined—to one’s mind, body, spirit, or emotion.” The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) goes one step further defining work stress specifically as, “harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker.”

Whatever the definition, stress—and especially job stress—has become an issue of profound importance for today’s employers. Just take a look at the following NIOSH statistics.

### ***Stress At The Worksite***

- Twenty-five percent of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives.
- Forty percent of workers report that their job is “very” or “extremely” stressful.
- Twenty-nine percent of workers feel “quite a bit” or “extremely” stressed while at work.
- Twenty-six percent of workers say they are “often” or “very often” burned out or stressed by their work.

If that’s not enough, in a recent survey conducted by The Gallup Organization, the following frightening statistics were revealed.

- Eighty percent of workers feel stress on the job. Nearly half say they need help in learning how to manage stress and 42 percent say their coworkers need such help.
- Fourteen percent of workers felt like striking a co-worker in the past year but didn’t.
- Twenty-five percent of workers feel like screaming or shouting because of job stress, and 10 percent are concerned about an individual at work they fear could become violent.
- Nine percent of employees are aware of an assault or violent act in their workplace, and 18 percent have experienced some sort of threat or verbal intimidation in the past year.



## Stress And Organizational Success

This type of negative stress (what is termed “bad stress,” e.g., feelings of vulnerability at work, lack of support, verbal abuse, etc.), can lead to disease, disability, and serious organizational challenges. In fact, every reputable research and health organization now reports that stress-related health issues not only negatively affect worker productivity, but also organizational healthcare costs.

Consider that NIOSH estimates job stress to be very costly to American business, ringing up a price tag of over \$300 billion annually as a result of direct medical, legal, and insurance costs, absenteeism, employee turnover, diminished productivity, accidents, workers’ compensation awards, and tort and other judgments. Worker health suffers as a result of stress, too. Reuters Health recently reported that job stress has a negative impact on virtually every part of the body. Stress increases the risk for heart disease, depression, anxiety, stroke, immune disorders, gastrointestinal problems, and diabetes, just to name a few.

## Stop The Madness: Winning The Battle Over Workplace Stress

Ready for some good news? It’s possible to take proactive steps at your organization to help avoid these huge costs and enable employees to better their health by effectively coping with stress at work and at home. Some leading-edge organizations are leading the way.

**Applied Materials.** Applied Materials—the world’s largest supplier of products and services to the technological manufacturing industry—has been successfully improving employee health and productivity for well over a decade through a comprehensive offering of health and wellness programs aimed at reducing stress and increasing overall health and well-being. One of Applied Materials’ cornerstone programs, *Stress Management and WorkLife*, involves a skills development class, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and the *Life Works Resource Referral* program. The success of the Applied Materials program is evident—a two-year study demonstrated a health cost savings of \$74,599 during the mid-to-late nineties.

**Mercy Medical Center - North Iowa.** A Midwest employer of 2,800, Mercy Medical Center – North Iowa is also generating lower healthcare costs and reduced psychosocial and spiritual distress among employees. Through its Kailo program (a holistic wellness initiative with a strong emphasis in stress reduction and helping employees find meaning and purpose in work and life), Mercy was recently able to show success in eliminating depressive symptomology on a case-by-case basis for 42 individuals that accessed depression-related services. Using figures from benchmarking studies on the costs of depression (a major health challenge related to stress), Mercy was able to estimate cost benefits in reduced healthcare claims and increased productivity for each employee that reduced depressive symptoms. Knowing that the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) estimates that depressed employees generate approximately \$3,200 a year in medical costs, and non-depressed employees generate only \$1,700, Mercy estimates that those 42 individuals who eliminated their depressive symptomology saved the organization about \$1,500 each in reduced healthcare claims.

Additionally, using information from Harvard researcher Dr. Ron Kessler, Mercy also estimates that they saved between \$182 and \$395 per month in lost productivity for each of the 42 individuals who eliminated depressive symptoms. When taken together, it can be estimated that by reducing or eliminating depressive symptoms in 42 individuals, Mercy has saved between \$154,728 and \$262,080 in lost productivity and healthcare claims. See the exclusive case study on page 26 for more information.

## Time To Get Going

It’s time for your organization to begin a stress management initiative. We’ve designed this issue of *Absolute Advantage* to be your starting point for developing a stress management program at your worksite that will enable you to generate the same positive health and financial outcomes as those companies described in this article. The 50 Great Ideas section of this magazine will lead you through the process of creating a stress management program, helping you avoid common pitfalls, and assisting you with the finer points of program development, refinement, and evaluation. The tips included here were developed by real health promotion practitioners at real companies and are proven methods you can count on.

In addition, you’ll want to check out the Notable Quotes section of this publication. It’s loaded with statistics, quotations, and even a little humor to help you make the case, and make your point. The exclusive case study featured in this edition of *Absolute Advantage* focuses on Mercy Medical Center – North Iowa and the Kailo program. Mercy Medical Center is a WELCOA Platinum Well Workplace and has built a wellness program that focuses on stress management, life satisfaction, and job engagement. It’s a feature you won’t want to miss.

Finally, you’ll want to read the WELCOA exclusive interview with Brian Luke Seaward, PhD, national stress management expert and renowned author of *Stressed is Desserts Spelled Backwards*, *The Art of Calm*, and the forthcoming, *Quiet Mind, Fearless Heart*. In this interview, Dr. Seaward speaks out on setting boundaries, achieving balance, and staying cool in a stressed-out world.

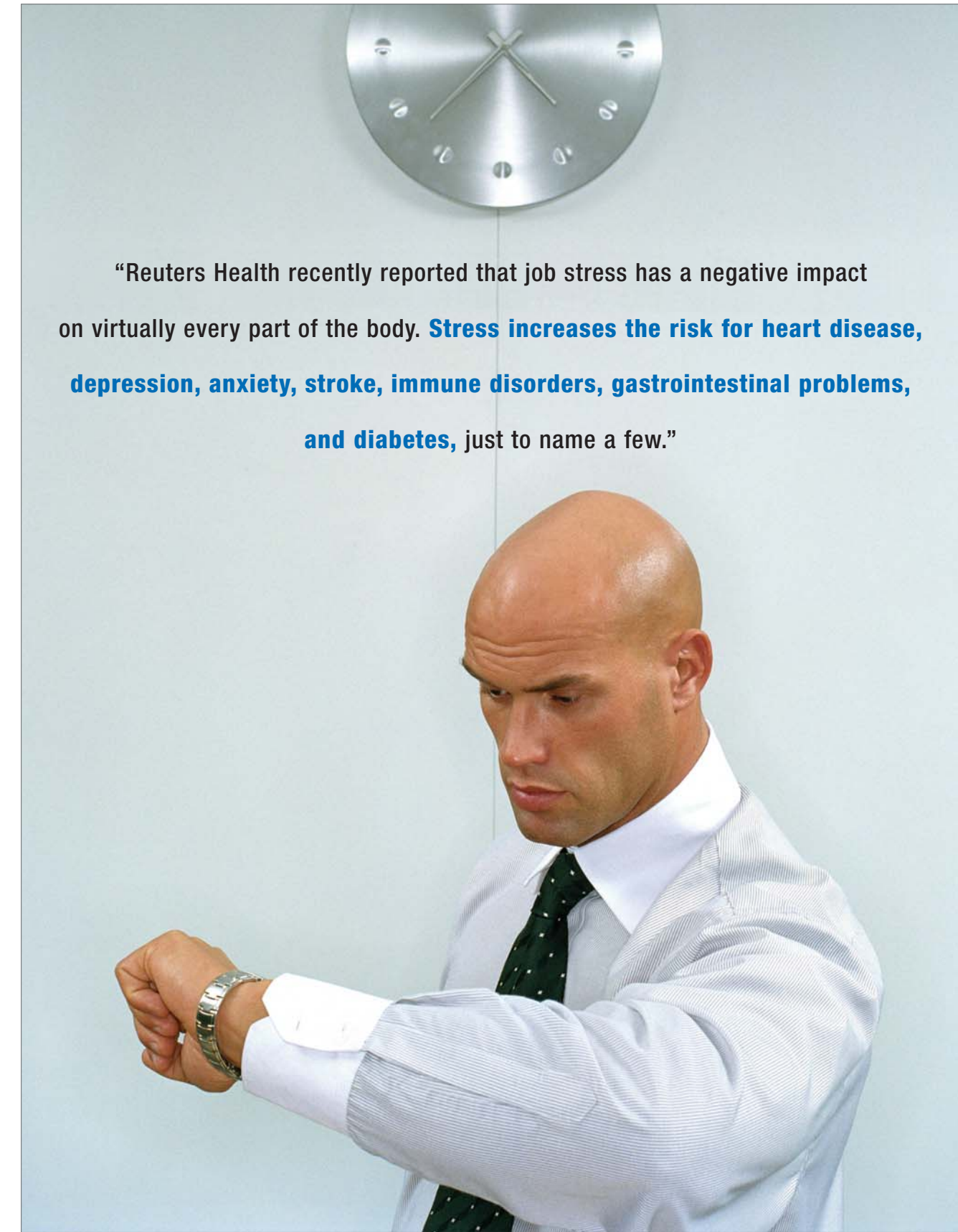
## Read On To Learn More About Worksite Stress Management

Stress is taking its toll on the health of American workers and the productivity and profits of American business. You can do your part to counteract this negative trend by implementing the proven and reliable stress management techniques outlined here at your organization. We encourage you to read this issue carefully and discuss the information with your wellness team, senior management, and employee population. Doing so will put your employees—and your business—on the right path toward reducing stress and improving profits and performance. ★

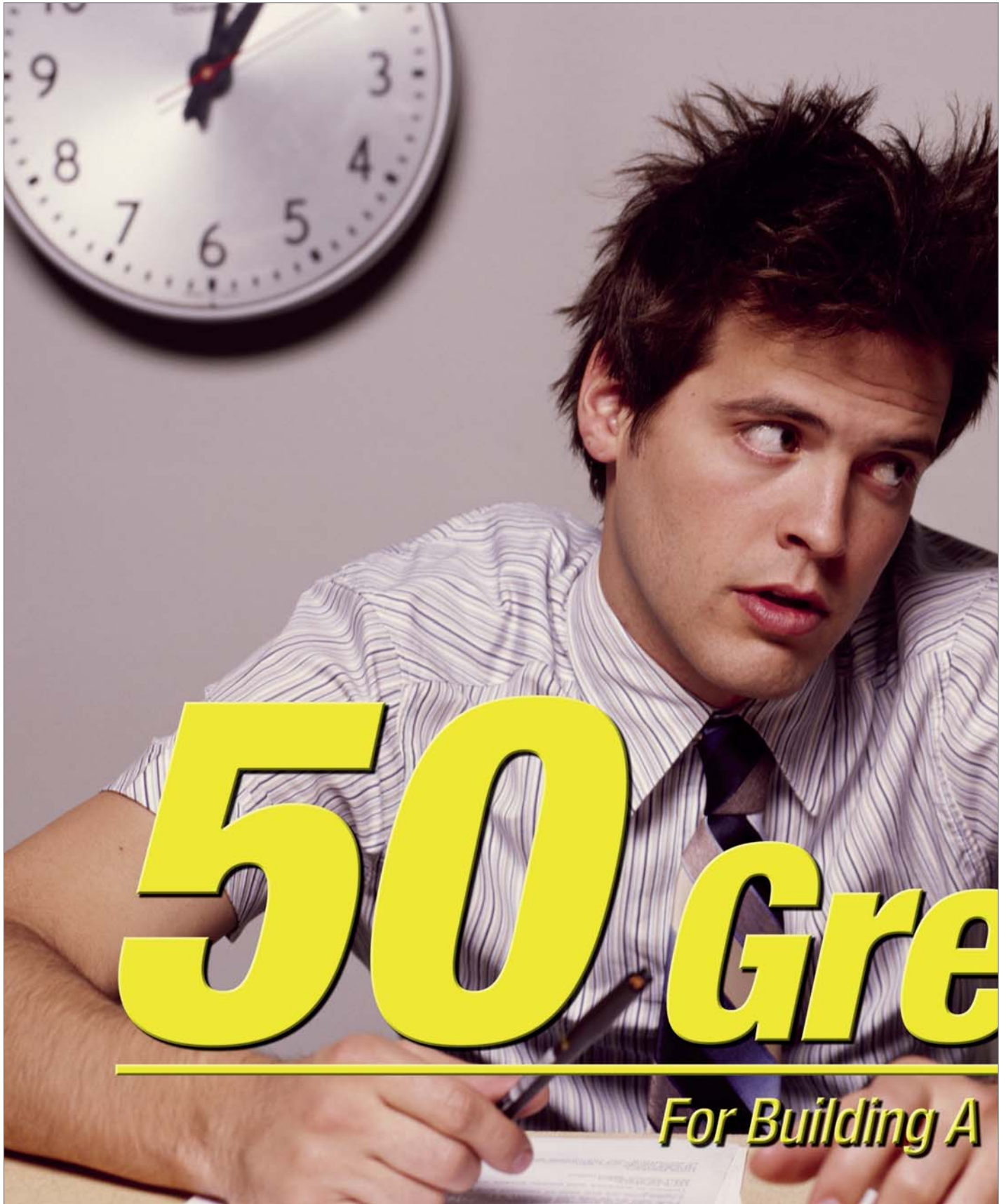


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Suggested Citation: Work & Stress In America: Reversing The Vicious Cycle. (2005). WELCOA’s *Absolute Advantage* Magazine, Special Stress Management Issue, 2-5.



“Reuters Health recently reported that job stress has a negative impact on virtually every part of the body. **Stress increases the risk for heart disease, depression, anxiety, stroke, immune disorders, gastrointestinal problems, and diabetes,** just to name a few.”



# 50 Gre

*For Building A*





# Great Ideas

*Worksite Stress Management Program*

Perhaps at no time in history have stress levels at the workplace been so high. Everyday, employees are being asked to do more work with fewer resources, and the “succeed at any cost” mentality has even driven some business leaders to commit criminal acts to maintain good standing with shareholders. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 40 percent of American workers now report that their job is either “very” or “extremely” stressful. Many of these workers then go

**1 Get to the top dogs.** Recruiting senior level support is the first key step in developing your stress management program. Showing the costs and lost productivity due to stress is one of the best ways to build a strong case and allocate the necessary resources for your program. Thousands of American workers suffer from symptoms of burnout. Even more, approximately 40 percent of worker turnover is due to job stress.<sup>1</sup> Spark senior executives’ attention by highlighting competitors’ successful programs, presenting collected data that indicates employee interest, or sharing convincing results from scientific research.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** Check out WELCOA’s online reference for gaining senior level support. To access this resource, visit [www.welcoa.org/wellworkplace/index.php?category=2](http://www.welcoa.org/wellworkplace/index.php?category=2) and click on “Capturing Senior Level Support.”

**2 Be there.** People who experience such events like natural disasters or other life threatening situations can suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. One study has shown that suicide rates increase after severe earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes—and it was concluded that there is a need for mental health support after severe disasters.<sup>2</sup> The American Psychological Association (APA) developed

its Disaster Response Network to be sympathetic to this need, offering free, onsite mental health services to disaster survivors and the relief workers who assist them.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** Immediately contact the APA at [pracpr@apa.org](mailto:pracpr@apa.org) for more information about the Disaster Response Network and learn how to customize a plan for your organization.

**3 Assemble a dream team.** Appoint members of your employee population to be part of a team effort to create a less stressful and more productive environment. Not only will a team approach be more energizing, but a diverse array of individuals will also generate more unique ideas for your program. Include members from various departments—different backgrounds reflect different stress factors and perspectives. This diversity is critical when you want to reach everyone in your company.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** Hand-pick your own “stress team,” making sure they embody the following characteristics:

- *a shared sense of purpose*
- *common priorities*
- *clearly-defined roles*
- *proper training*
- *adequate resources*

**4 Do your homework.** How can you select stress management programs if you don’t know what’s

causing your employees stress? Knowing the key issues before charging ahead will help you prevent wasted efforts. Gathering this information doesn’t need to be a major undertaking—simple employee interviews are a great way to get the most out of your stress management dollar.

home to a “second shift” that is even more stressful, or worse yet, avoid this second shift with the family altogether, leading to even more problems. This issue of *Absolute Advantage* has been designed to assist you in crafting worksite stress management programs to help your employees succeed in both work and life. Putting these ideas into action at your workplace can be an important first step toward reducing workplace stress, increasing productivity, and winning the battle over rising healthcare costs.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** Conduct 50 personal interviews with frontline employees at your organization. Use the following questions when conducting your interviews:

- *What are the top three causes of stress for you at work?*
- *Do you have good relationships with co-workers?*
- *Do you experience more stress from work or home?*

**5 Make good vibrations.** A recent Global 2000 Study, covering 30 countries, has found that listening to music is the most common activity people do to reduce stress—it ranks highest in North America with 64 percent claiming that music is their number one stress reliever.<sup>3</sup> With the easier access to music and its increasing portability, applying music to the workplace should be a simple task.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** Create an office policy allowing employees to listen to music at their workstation. Communicate this information throughout your organization. Pay particular attention to recent regulations concerning the downloading of music.

**6 Create a circle of friends.** Promote a healthy social environment. One study revealed that when an animal is surrounded by familiar companions and is exposed to a stressor, the level of its stress hormone does not increase. However, if the animal is alone and exposed to the same stressor, its hormone levels increased significantly.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, a familiar, friendly working environment can be effective for reducing stress levels.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** Hold a weekly or monthly lunch where employees from various departments can chat and get to know each other on a more personal/friendly basis. Hang up fliers that promote these luncheons throughout your organization.

**7 Inspect and detect.** Send out a questionnaire to employees. Ask them to rate the levels of stress in their lives right now, and how they forecast the future. Minor symptoms of stress are the early warning signs that life is getting out of hand and that stress needs to be better handled. Ask if they experience any physical symptoms as a result of stress (minor symptoms include headaches, indigestion, or heartburn).<sup>5</sup> This should give you an idea of the stress level in your employee population.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** Get started now—log on to [www.jobstresshelp.com/surveyvalues.htm](http://www.jobstresshelp.com/surveyvalues.htm) and check



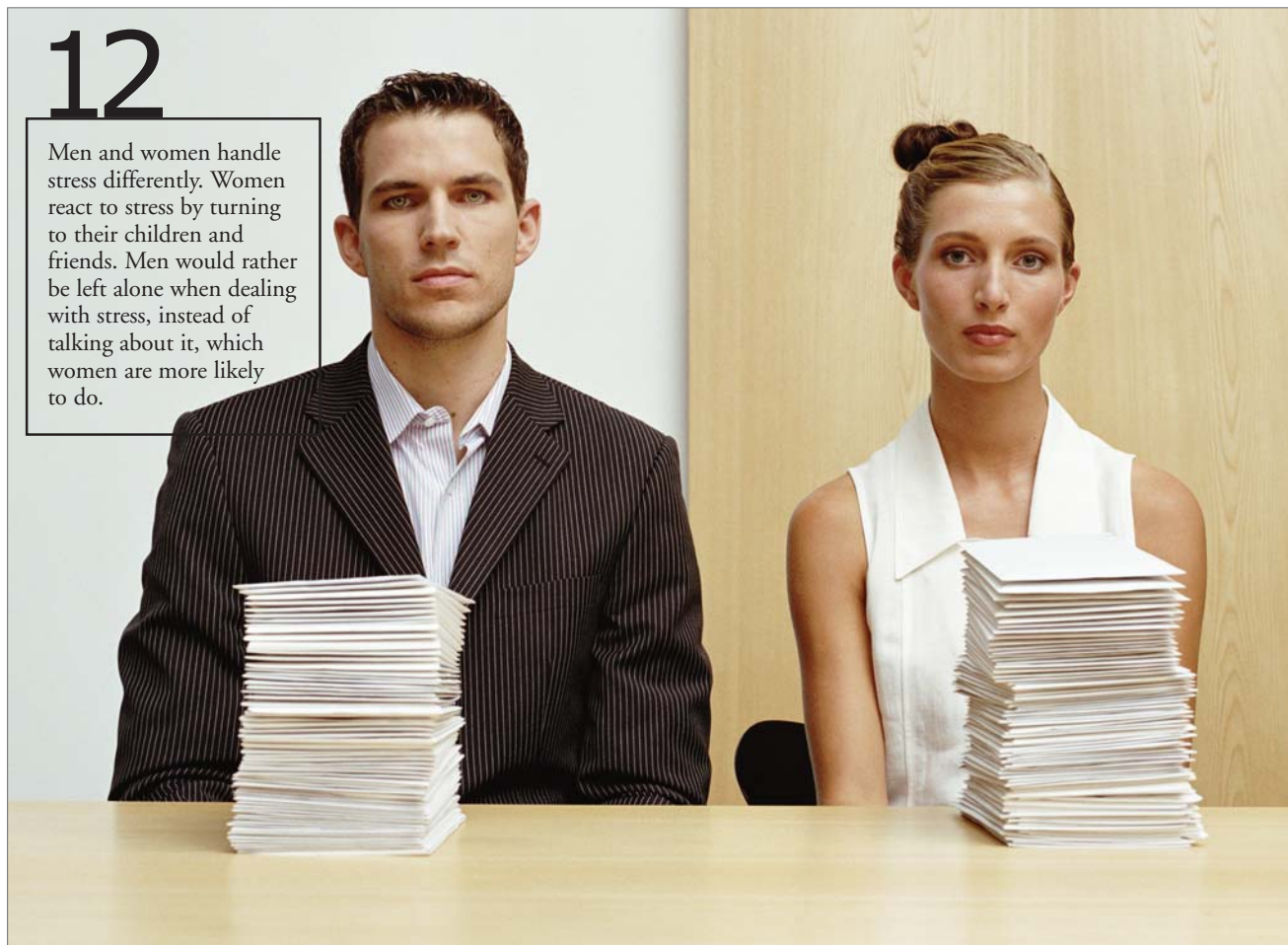
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Conduct 50 personal interviews with frontline employees at your organization. Use the following questions when conducting your interviews:

- *What are the top three causes of stress for you at work?*
- *Do you have good relationships with co-workers?*
- *Do you experience more stress from work or home?*

## 12

Men and women handle stress differently. Women react to stress by turning to their children and friends. Men would rather be left alone when dealing with stress, instead of talking about it, which women are more likely to do.



out the online workplace survey. Use this online assessment tool to monitor your employees' workplace stress.

**8 Share stories.** Sharing stories about the stress in one's life can be therapeutic and reaffirming. People can draw comfort and advice from individuals who have an understanding of what they're going through. This is a common practice among residents and physicians—since most people outside the medical field cannot understand their stories, they often turn to each other. People of other professions can do the same. Sharing stories is not only therapeutic, but it also helps build camaraderie and develops a community within your organization.<sup>6</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Visit [www.healthyculture.com](http://www.healthyculture.com). Judd Allen, PhD, President of the Human Resources Institute, has created a tool titled the *Wellness Mentor Program* to improve self-change skills and enhance peer support.

**9 Look, listen, and learn.** Try using various modes of communication to relay information. Consider handing out educational brochures or bulletins, or placing information about stress in a company newsletter. Classes and seminars may also help educate your employee population about stress. Charleston Area Medical Center knows that getting wellness messages out to their 5,000 employees is a

challenge. Employees work various shifts, so to get the word out, they use multiple strategies such as e-mail, information sheets, and paycheck messages.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Contact the Wellness Councils of America to test drive samples of *The Well Workplace* newsletter. Call 402-827-3590 or email to [wellworkplace@welcoa.org](mailto:wellworkplace@welcoa.org).

**10 Watch out for marital stress!** In addition to work stress, marital stress can also put strain on one's life. One study looked at marital stress among women who had experienced an acute coronary event. Research revealed that women with severe marital stress had a three-fold

increased risk of a new coronary event compared with women without marital stress.<sup>7</sup> Providing employees with marital counseling can help reduce an employee's stress level, possibly improving their health and performance at work. Or better yet, encourage employees' spouses to participate in such programs.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Identify anniversary dates of your married employees. Send out reminders—via e-mail—a week in advance so employees have plenty of time to plan their special day.

**11 Put pen to paper.** Hand out a "stress journal" to every employee and encourage employees to write about their stressful experiences.



One study found that patients with mild to moderately severe asthma or rheumatoid arthritis had positive relevant changes in their health after four months of writing about their stressful experiences.<sup>8</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Get blank-paged journals from local bookstores. You might want to write topics on some of the pages such as, “How I deal with anxiety” or, “What stresses me out” to get employees started. Your employees can keep the journal private, or you can designate a time when employees can volunteer to read some of their journal entries out loud to their peers.

## 12 Realize gender differences.

Men and women handle stress differently. A recent study released by the University of California, Los Angeles revealed that women react to stress by turning to their children and friends instead of using the “fight or flight” response often used by men. The study also found that many men would rather be left alone when dealing with stress, instead of talking about it, which women are more likely to do.<sup>9</sup> This information should help you tailor your programs.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Find out what percentage of your worker population is male/female. Use this information to develop your programs appropriately—provide one or two social networks or support groups geared toward women, and provide stress-relieving activities that men can do alone, such as running or lifting weights.

## 13 Embrace ergonomics.

Approximately 600,000 people suffer on-the-job ergonomic injuries each year, at a cost of \$9 billion, according to government

statistics.<sup>10</sup> These injuries are often caused by a rapid repetition of normal activities such as typing, gripping, twisting, or reaching. By simply providing the right type of equipment, such as headsets, proper chairs, or a stretching routine, you can significantly cut down on the number of repetitive stress injuries. For example, Lincoln Plating Company in Lincoln, Nebraska significantly reduced the amount of injuries in the company by employing a stretching routine before and after shifts. Bottom line: assess every workstation, make notes, keep record of incidents related to repetitive strain injuries, and lastly, don't delay making changes to work areas where needed.

### **>> TAKE ACTION!**

Determine the ergonomic status of your organization by accessing ergonomic safety companies such as Painless Gains at [www.painlessgains.com](http://www.painlessgains.com). Click on Product Tour for a list of available ergonomic tools that should help you assess the work environment.

## 14 See the big picture.

Stress can affect a person's entire well-being. So make programs holistic—encourage healthy eating, regular exercise, good sleeping habits, and strong family connections, all of which can help fight the negative effects of stress. Providing a supportive environment at the workplace is one of the best ways to encourage a healthy lifestyle—place water coolers throughout the establishment, provide healthy food choices in vending machines and cafeterias, and make educational tools such as brochures, newsletters, and journals readily available.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** If you really want to get in touch with holistic wellness, contact Jon Robison, PhD. Dr.

Robison is a holistic wellness expert. He can be reached at [www.jonrobison.net](http://www.jonrobison.net).

## 15 Lose the stress, don't gain the pounds.

A common reaction to stress is overeating—and it's usually not fruits and veggies that are being scarfed down. You can help combat this problem by providing healthy alternatives in the cafeteria and break rooms. Just one ounce of regular potato chips has 150 calories and 10 grams of fat, whereas most fruit bars have only 70 calories and zero grams of fat.<sup>11</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Contact the food supplier of your vending machines and cafeteria and work out healthier options for your employees. Also, post small notes on vending machines informing them of healthy alternatives.

## 16 Walk out on your stress.

The stresses of life and work will never completely go away. And unfortunately, you can't just walk out on your job. You can, however, walk out on your stress. Small bursts of physical activity can produce significant results in terms of reducing stress. The key is giving employees time to incorporate a little physical activity into their workday. This is an opportunity for workers to vent any distress that has accumulated throughout the day. Highsmith Inc. recognized this benefit and created a walking trail around their campus—a concept that exemplifies their entire workplace culture.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Make break time walk time. Talk to department supervisors and get them to spend their break time on a quick walk. Better yet, get senior level executives to lead this effort. And most importantly, don't forget to put on your walking shoes.

## 17 Keep your eye on the prize.

Some employees need incentives to get motivated. As stated by Crystal Jackson in the book, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*, “Motivation is based on what you bring to it as an individual. What is motivational to one person isn't motivational to another.”<sup>12</sup> Try to include various ways for participants to be rewarded. For example, for those who successfully complete programs, consider offering discount coupons for a local bookstore, movie theater, or restaurant—this way, employees can pick what appeals to them most.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Contact your community businesses. Many companies offer complementary gift certificates or coupons—these make great incentives.

## 18 Give 'em a say.

Research has shown that lack of control over one's job increases the risk of coronary heart disease, while job strain results in elevated blood pressure.<sup>13</sup> Although the details of some jobs obviously can't change, giving employees the chance to express some sort of power over their work environment could significantly reduce the negative effects of stress.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Have managers or supervisors designate individuals to represent the various departments in your organization. Give these selected employees a chance to speak out at meetings and voice their concerns. If their requests for change are realistic, consider amending policy to accommodate their suggestions.

## 19 Stress safety.

The threat of workplace violence can be very stressful—nearly 1,000 workers are murdered and 1.5 million are assaulted in the

workplace every year.<sup>14</sup> Learn to identify environmental conditions associated with workplace assaults—control strategies have been developed and implemented in a number of companies. To empower employees to take action, post lists of risk factors and a phone number that can be called for help. Some signs of risk factors include verbal or nonverbal threats, vandalism, robbery, arson, and sabotage.<sup>15</sup>

>> **TAKE ACTION!** Contact the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) at [www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/](http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/) for information on safe working environments. Incorporate non-violence guidelines into company policy and let it be known that any type of violence or harassment will not be tolerated.

**20 Continue the education.** With today's fast paced technology, much of the workforce is faced with confusion and lack of certainty when it comes to their own technical skills—some individuals may even worry about keeping their current positions. Alleviate some of the fear by holding career development sessions that continue to educate employees on technological advancements. Lincoln Plating Company (LPC) offers their employees career development programs, in which an employee meets with a trainer to discuss their career at LPC. After the completion of a class, employees receive salary increases.

>> **TAKE ACTION!** Contact community computer vendors and inquire about instructional courses or certifications for your employees. If possible, develop a partnership to provide ongoing education and training.

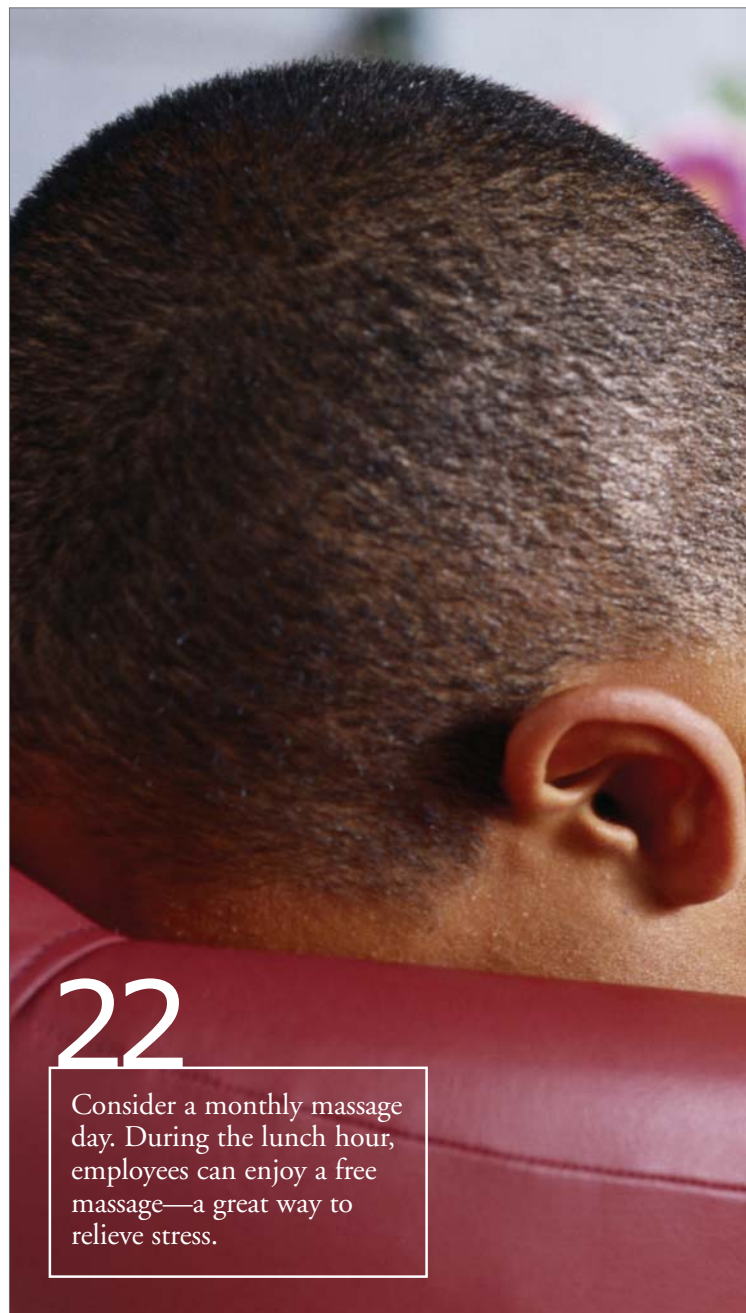
**21 Stress the Net.** Let technology help you in the battle against stress. This can involve organizing a company chat room where employees can vent, or using e-mail to relay stress management information. In any case, the Internet is a fast and convenient tool for implementing a stress-free health initiative. St. Joseph Regional Health Center has an online health promotion program, *The Health Challenge*. They post interactive quizzes that target specific health issues stress management, for one. The program is aimed at improving employee health knowledge and modifying lifestyle behavior change.<sup>16</sup>

>> **TAKE ACTION!** Get in touch with WELCOA about building a web-based wellness application service. We can customize wellness web pages for organizations to provide health information for employees. Log on to [healthstrategies.welcoa.org](http://healthstrategies.welcoa.org) or call (402)827-3590 to find out what works best for your company.

**22 Send a message through massage.** Consider a monthly massage day. During the lunch hour, employees can enjoy a free massage—a great way to relieve stress. Merrill Lynch, for example, holds health fairs for their employees, who not only get free massages but a number of screenings to help determine their health status.

>> **TAKE ACTION!** Contact local massage therapists to provide monthly on-site massage services. Also, utilize their expertise to educate employees on the benefits of massage.

**23 Distinguish between good and bad stress.** Not all stress is bad. In some



**22**

Consider a monthly massage day. During the lunch hour, employees can enjoy a free massage—a great way to relieve stress.

cases, stress can actually be good for us. Exciting or challenging events, such as the birth of a child or the completion of a project at work, can be exhilarating and produce as much stress as a tragedy or natural disaster. The key here is teaching employees how to distinguish good stress from bad stress. A good way of doing this is to provide them with a list of warning signs that indicate

stress is negatively affecting them—fatigue, anger, anxiety, insomnia, poor appetite, and headaches are all common signs of being overstressed.<sup>5</sup>

>> **TAKE ACTION!** For more information on good stress vs. bad stress, log on to [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and search for Barry Lenson's book, *Good Stress, Bad Stress*. This book will help you make sense of stress from both perspectives.





**24 Keep in touch.** Having a support system is a crucial element when dealing with stress. Keep this in mind for employees who have to frequently travel on the job—Offutt Air Force Base does. Omaha-based Offutt knows that family separation is tough and stressful on everyone. So they try to curb this by providing video teleconferencing phone calls

where families and traveling personnel can talk and see each other.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** If you have traveling employees, provide them with phone cards or e-mail accounts so they can keep in touch with their loved ones. To keep family members from feeling too out of touch, encourage the travelers to give their families maps indicating

where they are during their time away from home.

**25 Consider consumer debt.** Americans are carrying more debt now than ever before—about \$1.35 trillion altogether.<sup>17</sup> Personal finance can be a very stressful part of one's life. To help prevent a financial meltdown, hold a money management class. Simple strategies such as budgeting and setting aside

for savings can help lift the burden of financial stress.

**>>TAKE ACTION!** Contact the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, which offers free or low-cost debt counseling, financial education, budgeting assistance, and other financial services for consumers. Locate an office near you by checking out [www.nfcc.org](http://www.nfcc.org) or call toll-free 1-800-388-2227.

## 26 **Develop a plan of attack.**

Be prepared for annual events—they come at the same time every year, yet most of us are never prepared and end up stressed out for no reason. Whether it's the holidays, tax time, birthdays, or anniversaries, you can always plan ahead. Reminding employees to set money and time aside for these occasions can help lessen the stress.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Set up a database in which employees are informed ahead of time of special upcoming events. In addition, include stress-relieving tips within the reminder, such as taking time out for themselves, exercising, or listening to music.

## 27 **Play into your strengths.**

Stress can be difficult to handle. However, if you can help your employees identify their individual strengths—those things that make them who they are and successful in what they do—dealing with stress can be a whole lot easier. In fact, the *American Journal of Health Promotion* suggests that focusing on these individual assets can be a powerful defense and management tool against stress.<sup>18</sup> Knowing that an individual's strengths can serve as a personal weapon against stress, it is important that your employees have a solid understanding of what their strengths are and how to utilize them in their battle to avoid the negative effects of excessive stress.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Invest in a personality or strength assessment tool for your employees. A good example is the StrengthsFinder test from the Gallup organization—check out [www.strengthsfinder.com](http://www.strengthsfinder.com) for more information.

## 28 **Get active.**

Promote physical activity and team sports—working up a sweat is a great way to let off steam. In addition, any type of league sport such as basketball or softball is a great way to build strong relationships. Even more, these relationships can be beneficial off the field. In fact, they can prove to be of great value when coping with stressful situations at work.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Get employees connected through team sports. Basketball, softball, and bowling leagues are all great ways to get started. For more information on recreational activities contact your local parks and recreation center.

## 29 **Hold relaxation classes.**

Make relaxation classes available to employees. Various relaxation techniques can be used to teach employees how to cope with stress and ultimately reduce stress levels. The key here is variety—not one certain relaxation technique is going to work for everyone. Yoga and meditation are just a couple of options to help employees relax and relieve stress. Leave brochures or pamphlets in break rooms or the cafeteria explaining these techniques, and where they can go to learn more.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Obtain a copy of *Yoga at Work* by Miriam Freedman and Janice Hanks. This insightful book utilizes the age-old wisdom of Yoga as it relates to the work environment. It also provides a handy 10-minute yoga workout for busy people. The book is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 30 **Encourage communication.**

The act of poking one's head over a cubicle wall is commonly



# 29

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known as “prairie-dogging.” It’s only natural for people to want human contact—this may be the reason behind prairie-dogging. To avoid this sometimes annoying practice, find a way to facilitate communication among your employees. This may involve setting aside time for employees to communicate face-to-face about issues at work.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Work with your IT department to create an intranet option that allows employees to create their own web pages. You can even add an option for instant chat. Make the function available only during certain times of the day, and make sure to use an incentive to bolster participation.

**31 Promote individuality.** Be flexible and allow your employees to express their personalities. For instance, permit employees to display personal belongings in their work area—pictures, personal gadgets, awards, diplomas, etc. Familiar surroundings through personal touch could increase an employee’s interest and sense of ownership at the workplace.<sup>19</sup> Of course, everything must be done within the limits of organizational protocol and good taste... but if you do it right, it’s great for your company and great for your employees.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Encourage employees to personalize their workstation with meaningful items—and then conduct a contest to see if your employees can identify whose workstation is whose.

**32 Educate and decaffeinate.** Although extra soda and coffee can serve as a short energizer, too much can

**Take necessary measures to eliminate office conditions that could cause unnecessary stress—noise, lack of privacy, poor lighting, poor ventilation, or poor temperature control.**

actually do more harm than good—caffeine is a stimulant and may promote even more nervousness and tension.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, one out of every four beverages consumed in America today is a soft drink.<sup>21</sup> Make water an easy alternative to turn to rather than caffeine-filled drinks—water coolers should be just as accessible as soda machines.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Pick up the telephone book and identify vendors who can provide your organization with water coolers. Yes, there is an expense associated with this... but what about the expense associated with high stress and low productivity?

**33 Preach breakfast.** An empty stomach leaves you less able to cope with stress. Persuade your employees to eat an adequate and nutritious breakfast—one that includes at least one-fourth of their daily calories and nutrients.<sup>20</sup> One word of warning: discourage employees from drive-thru breakfasts, which are often high in calories and fat, causing them to feel sluggish rather than energized for work. Offer healthy breakfast foods in cafeterias and break rooms such as fruit, whole-grain cereal, and bagels.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Sponsor a business breakfast! The idea

here is to offer a free, nutritious breakfast to all employees. And while they’re taking part in good food and good conversation, use the time to promote the value of eating a healthy breakfast.

**34 Check it out.** Assemble a library of educational materials. This can include relaxation cassette tapes, self-help books on tape, printed materials including books and workbooks, and instructional videotapes on topics ranging from time management to self-hypnosis. Hold a drawing for employees who donate to this library—prizes can include a complimentary yoga class or a free massage.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Get in touch with the major providers of workplace health information. Access our website at [www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org), and click on Premier Providers for a list of reputable vendors.

**35 Friendly facilities.** Take necessary measures to eliminate office conditions that could cause unnecessary stress—noise, lack of privacy, poor lighting, poor ventilation, or poor temperature control. For example, workers have suffered from “sick-building syndrome”—caused by over 1,500 bacterial and chemical indoor-air pollutants. As a





# 39

A study found that a nature scene of water surrounded by trees had a substantial impact and resulted in much less anxiety for the patient within two days. Therefore, placing nature-oriented art throughout your building may be beneficial for employees who are stressed.



result, employees suffer from cold-like symptoms, which can translate into lost workdays and productivity.<sup>22</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Conduct a facility assessment. Examine each workstation as well as the overall working environment. Take copious notes and document everything you see—both good and bad. Then, get in touch with the National Safety Council and pick up publications that can provide important guidance on how to shore up some of your organization's weak spots.

**36 Meet-n-eat.** To reach a wide audience, provide stress management classes at times when employees are usually available, such as lunchtime or afternoon breaks. In addition to being more convenient for the employees, having educational sessions at these times will not force them to sacrifice any free time.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Schedule a lunch 'n' learn session—however, take great effort to make it the best lunch 'n' learn your organization has ever offered. Think “make it wow, and do it now.” To help you maximize the impact, be sure to find a great speaker with a great mind and a great personality. In addition, make sure that the food is healthy and, at the same time, tasty.

**37 Get the combo.** Don't expect any single stress management intervention to reach every employee. Different interventions appeal to different employees. Implement a combination of programs to maximize your program reach. A review in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* concluded that the most positive results in stress management resulted from a combination of two or more techniques. The review of 64

studies recommends that stress management interventions should be more comprehensive.<sup>18</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** To access articles and many other health promotion resources log on to [www.healthpromotionjournal.com](http://www.healthpromotionjournal.com) to subscribe to the *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

**38 Implement work/life programs.** Data from the Families and Work Institute reveals that 70 percent of parents say they don't have enough time with their children.<sup>23</sup> To help ease the stress at the workplace due to family concerns, try implementing work/life programs. For example, if you have a bowling league, consider a family night. Any work activities that can involve the family are a strong start to promoting the necessary balance between work and family.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Sponsor a parent/child banquet at your company. The big idea here is to create a special opportunity where parents and children can appreciate their relationships and celebrate each other. Can't afford a banquet? What about a potluck?

**39 Get artsy.** Research has shown that art depicting nature can have beneficial effects on adult patients experiencing stress and anxiety. A study found that a nature scene of water surrounded by trees had a substantial impact and resulted in much less anxiety for the patient within two days.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, placing nature-oriented art throughout your building may be beneficial for employees who are stressed.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Create a special place in your organization where employees can take a few moments to enjoy

## Don't expect any single stress management intervention to reach every employee. Different interventions appeal to different employees. Implement a combination of programs to maximize your program reach.

a relaxing environment. Soft chairs, great music, warm lighting, and a stress-free environment can go a long way toward taking the edge off.

**40 Suspend hypertension.** Many signs of stress are obvious. But some less obvious indicators can be just as serious—even deadly. A high level of stress is known to cause high blood pressure—a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke. A study by Shoemaker and Tasto indicated that individuals participating in muscle relaxation and biofeedback stress management techniques showed significant decreases in blood pressure compared to a control group.<sup>18</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Make heart rate monitors available to employees. Such devices will allow them to keep track of their heart rate and make sure stress levels at work are not adversely affecting their cardiovascular health. For information on heart rate monitors, check out [www.polarusa.com](http://www.polarusa.com).

**41 Get personal.** Performance evaluations can be one of the most stressful times for any employee. However, by clearly communicating the reason for evaluations as well as how the feedback should be used, you can significantly reduce employee stress during

these important times. Take, for example, the approach of CJC Consultancy. This innovative organization provides Stress/Lifestyle Management Training Courses for its clients.<sup>25</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Identify when performance evaluations take place in your organization. With dates firmly in hand, convene a communications task force to develop important messages about your company's evaluation process—it's a great way to take the stress out of a very demanding time.

**42 Offer personal counseling.** Encouraging employees to seek personal counseling sessions to control job stress and employee feuds is an idea whose time has come. A study by Gray-Toft reported that after participating in a counseling support group, employees had higher satisfaction with their co-workers than the control group. Further more, these employees also reported lower job stress after their counseling.<sup>18</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Take a look at National Employee Assistance Services, Inc. at [www.neas.com](http://www.neas.com). This site is loaded with useful information that will help you learn more about the qualifications and characteristics of effective workplace counseling.

## 43

A common source of stress is intra-office relationships. Training employees in the areas of conflict resolution, harassment prevention, multicultural issues, etc., can help improve work relationships and even reduce the level of stress in your organization.







## 43 **Help employees develop interpersonal skills.**

A common source of stress is intra-office relationships. Training employees in the areas of conflict resolution, harassment prevention, multicultural issues, etc., can help improve work relationships and even reduce the level of stress in your organization. Sound impossible? One company is already ahead of the game. In fact, through their T.A.G. program, Highsmith Inc. focuses on the overall growth of each employee, including managing stress and resolving conflicts.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** For assistance in developing your employees' interpersonal skills, look to WorkRelationships, Inc.—a company that specializes in helping managers and employees build healthy work relationships through training or consultation services. You can contact them at [www.workrelationships.com](http://www.workrelationships.com).

## 44 **Mail it out, dial it up.**

Use multiple channels to address worksite stress—the more approaches used to intervene in workplace job strain, the better. Research guru Dr. Kenneth Pelletier and his colleagues performed a study to determine the effect of mail and telephone-based approaches on alleviating the negative effects of job strain. Subjects received materials via mail every six weeks over the course of a year and follow-up phone calls from health educators. The study demonstrated that both mail and telephone-delivered job strain intervention can be effective in increasing employees' knowledge of job strain risk factors, identifying possible solutions, and altering risky behaviors.<sup>26</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Contact the StayWell organization at [www.staywell.com](http://www.staywell.com) to learn more about individualized counseling utilizing multiple strategies and techniques.

**45 Rest in the power of one.** Just one health consultation for individuals with stress symptoms can make a difference. Seamonds conducted a study of 500 corporate employees who received a health interview covering a wide range of topics, including stress and coping. They were also given relevant written materials and referred to community agencies. The group that received the health interview experienced a reduction in absenteeism.<sup>18</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Identify counselors and counseling agencies within your community and format the information into an employee booklet—don't put it off... do it today.

**46 Lean on me.** Needing help can be frustrating, but not knowing where to go to get it can be even more annoying. Don't let this predicament happen to your employees. One of the most common mistakes made in stress management is raising the awareness about stress, but not telling employees where to go.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Hmm... you know that booklet you just developed as a result of reading Great Idea #45? Get it in the hands of your employees! By making this information available to your employees, you've significantly increased the likelihood that they'll know where to turn in times of trouble.

**47 Follow up.** So you've done the research, you've done the planning, and you've initiated a great new program. But, how well does it work? Is participation steady? Is participant satisfaction high? Is the program making a difference? The only way to find out is through program follow up. It can be as simple as asking participants how they like the program. You can also admin-

ister program evaluations. The information you obtain will empower you to tailor your program to your specific setting and participants.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Visit [www.welcoa.org/wellworkplace/index.php?category=2](http://www.welcoa.org/wellworkplace/index.php?category=2) and click on "Consistently Evaluating Outcomes." You'll find great information and program evaluation tips to put you on the right track.

**48 Offer alcohol & drug abuse programs.** Unfortunately, many individuals turn to alcohol and other drugs as a means to cope with stressful situations. Provide programs for alcohol and drug abuse. You may want to leave this one to the pros. Consider an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). They can be expensive, but they're generally more effective. The average annual cost for an EAP ranges from \$12 to \$20 per employee—the return, however, is significant. United Airlines estimates that it has a \$16.95 return for every dollar spent on employee assistance.<sup>27</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Check out your local chapter of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD). You can find it by doing a search on any internet search engine.

**49 It's all about time management.** Whether it's constantly coming into work five minutes late, forgetting appointments, or missing deadlines, time management is a problem for countless worksites. Adopting good time management skills will not only reduce stress, but can also be the difference between keeping and losing a job. In fact, 40 percent of worker turnover is due to job stress.<sup>1</sup>

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Offer seminars that teach employees how to prioritize, make lists, set reachable goals, etc. One organization that does a particularly great job with time

management is Franklin Covey. Check out their website at [www.franklincovey.com](http://www.franklincovey.com).

**50 Do some spring cleaning.** It's hard for employees to find time to straighten up their work areas. According to a survey by Taylor Nelson Sofres Intersearch, 46 percent of men and 55 percent of women save things in files at work. The bad news? Twenty-six percent of men and 23 percent of women save things in piles at work. To combat this problem, consider design-

ing a periodic clean-up time for employees to get organized. You can schedule this weekly, monthly, or however often is necessary and practical.

**>> TAKE ACTION!** Create a temporary sanctuary known as "the great dumping ground." Encourage employees to take outdated paperwork and launch it. Because of sensitivity, you may want to make a shredder available to avoid any potentially compromising situations. And better yet, recycle everything you touch.★

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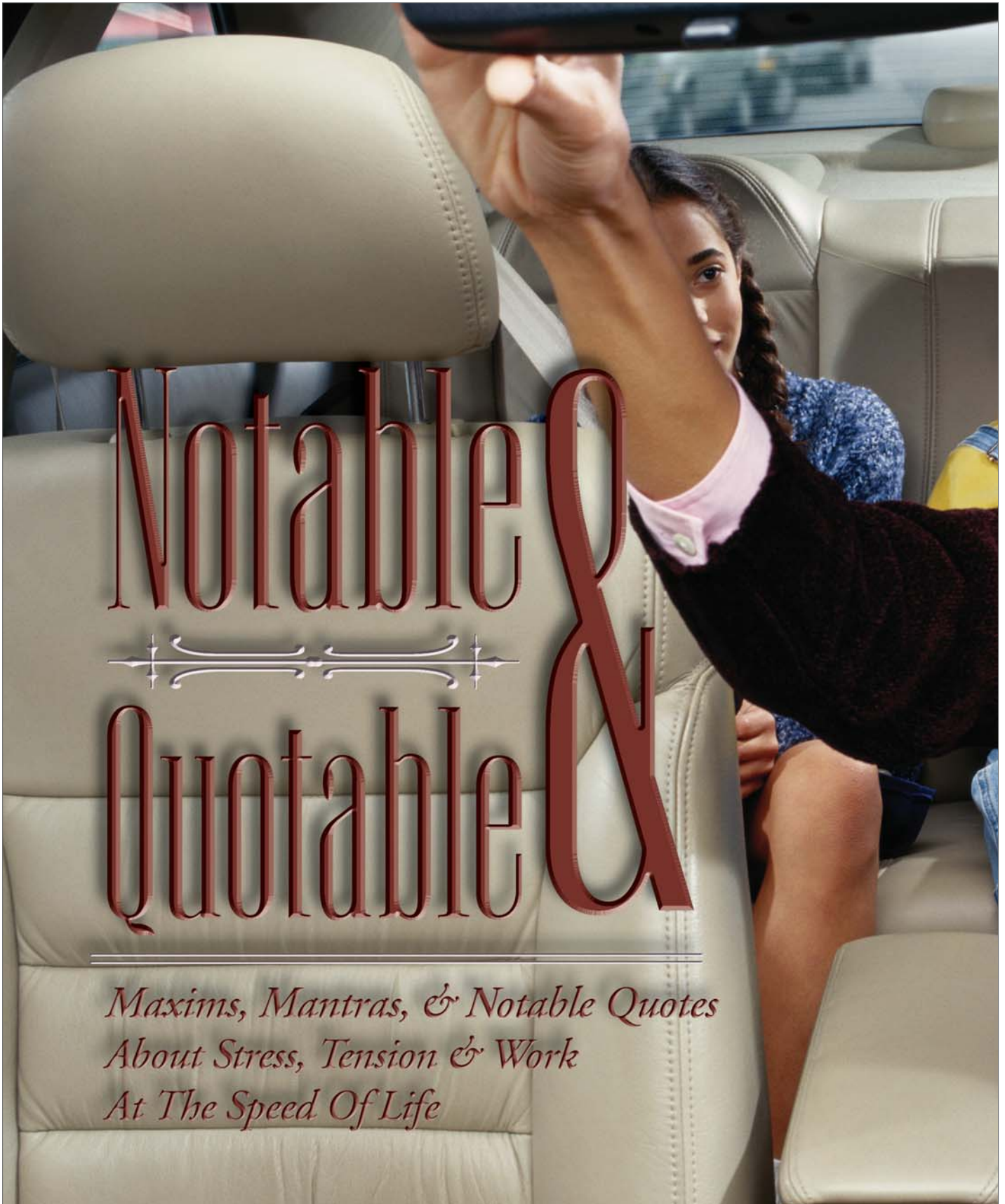
**Suggested Citation:** 50 Great Ideas For Building A Worksite Stress Management Program. (2005). WELCOA's *Absolute Advantage* Magazine, Special Stress Management Issue, 6-21.



# 50

It's no secret that being organized can minimize the stress in your daily life. Encourage employees to take outdated paperwork and launch it. Because of sensitivity, you may want to make a shredder available to avoid any potentially compromising situations. And better yet, recycle everything you touch.





# Notable & Quotable

*Maxims, Mantras, & Notable Quotes  
About Stress, Tension & Work  
At The Speed Of Life*





**These days, there is a enough** information and statistics available on stress management and stress-related health issues to make your head spin. So, where do you start? Below you'll find some compelling information to make you think, make you act, and help you build and maintain an effective work-site stress management program. After reading through the information presented on these pages, you'll be better prepared to present a strong case for developing a stress management initiative at your organization. You'll also be equipped with the current information you need to market, communicate, and evaluate your program appropriately.



**Stress At A Glance...**

- ✓ Forty-three percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects due to stress—roughly 90 million people.<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Seventy-five to ninety percent of all visits to primary care physicians are for stress-related complaints or disorders.<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Tranquilizers, antidepressants, and anti-anxiety medications account for one-fourth of all prescriptions written in the US each year.<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ Job stress is estimated to cost US Industry \$300 billion annually—this is more than the total budget for the entire US Department of Defense.<sup>1,3</sup>
- ✓ Workers who must take time off work because of stress, anxiety, or a related disorder will be off the job for about 20 days.<sup>4</sup>

**Statistically, if there are 100 people in your company or department...<sup>5</sup>**

- 1** uses cocaine
- 40** feel they're under moderate stress
- 8** are heavy drinkers
- 16** smoke
- 50** sit all day to do their work
- 21** have cardiovascular disease
- 25** have high blood pressure
- 6** have diagnosed diabetes
- 4** have undiagnosed diabetes
- 18** or more have high blood cholesterol
- 64** are overweight or obese
- 29** don't wear their safety belts regularly
- 6** use marijuana

**Top Five Most Stressful Cities**

1. Tacoma, WA
2. Miami, FL
3. New Orleans
4. Las Vegas, NV
5. New York, NY

**Top Five Least Stressful Cities**

1. Albany-Schenectady-Troy, NY
2. Harrisburg-Lebanon-Carlisle, PA
3. Orange County, CA
4. Nassau-Suffolk, NY
5. Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN

—[http://www.bestplaces.net/stress/stress\\_study1.asp](http://www.bestplaces.net/stress/stress_study1.asp)

**Stress Through The Years**

- 1956** - The word “stress” enters the American vernacular.
- 1957** - Bufferin and Anacin use tension to sell headache relief.
- 1963** - Valium is introduced, a minor tranquilizer used to treat non-psychotic anxiety states.
- 1973** - Xanax, an anti-anxiety drug, is introduced.
- 1978** - Prozac, an antidepressant, is introduced.

**1985** - Coty introduced Calgon bath gel and coined the catch phrase, “Calgon, take me away.”

**1997** - St. John's Wort, an herbal remedy for depression, receives consumer attention as a Prozac alternative.

**2004** - The NIH reports that preschoolers are the fastest growing group of patients in the US receiving anti-depressant medication.

“Future shock is the shattering disorientation that occurs when individuals are exposed to too much change in too short a period of time.”

—Alvin Toffler

Three-fourths of employees believe the worker has more on-the-job stress than a generation ago.<sup>4</sup>

—Princeton Survey Research Associates

“It's been said that the only person without stress is a dead person.”

—The Idiot's Guide to Managing Stress

“The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work.”  
—Robert Frost







Sixty to 80 percent of industrial accidents are due to stress.  
—*The American Institute of Stress*

**The Stress Diet?**

This popular “joke diet” was widely circulated on the Internet—it’s authors purportedly believed that these eating habits would help a person cope with the stress that builds during the day.

**Breakfast**

- 1 banana
- 1 slice whole wheat toast
- 8 oz. fresh squeezed orange juice

**Lunch**

- 4 oz. broiled fish fillet
- 1 cup steamed broccoli
- 1 glass of iced tea
- 1 chocolate chip cookie

**Mid-Afternoon Snack**

- Remainder of cookies in pack
- 2 pints of chocolate ice cream
- 1 jar hot fudge sauce (optional: nuts, cherries, whipped cream)

**Dinner**

- 2 loaves garlic bread with cheese
- Large pepperoni & cheese pizza
- Six-pack of beer
- 3 candy bars (your choice)

**Late Evening News**

- Entire frozen chocolate cake eaten directly from the freezer

“An arrogant egomaniac, our boss loves to search employees’ desks when they leave the office and open their personal mail, if it comes to the office by mistake. As he struts around the office enjoying his power trip, he browbeats and belittles employees with comments like, ‘This office belongs to me, without exception, and the employee has no rights whatsoever to complain or protest.’ ”

—*Actual Entry Submitted, Best Boss, Worst Boss*

**First employee:**

“So, is your job secure?”

**Second employee:**

“Oh, yes. It’s me they can do without.”

“It’s not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it.”  
—*Hans Seyle*

The top three sources of stress are related to work.<sup>6</sup>

1. Personal finances
2. Career
3. Too many responsibilities

—*The Idiot’s Guide To Managing Stress*

“I have a new philosophy. I’m only going to dread one day at a time.”  
—*Charles M. Schulz*

“Human beings are remarkably resilient. They can deal with almost anything as long as they do not become too isolated.”  
—*Harvard Business Review*

Only 25 percent of all Americans know their next-door neighbors.  
—*National Geographic*

“A buildup of bacteria in the indoor air of the county courthouse in Bartow, Florida, led to its evacuation. This \$30 million building, was reconstructed, along with its air-conditioning and ventilation systems, at an additional expense of \$37 million.”  
—*Wall Street Journal*

In 2000, doctors wrote over 42 million prescriptions for the six most widely used anti-depressants.  
—*USA Today*

Stress has been linked to all the leading causes of death—heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis, and suicide.<sup>1</sup>  
—*The American Institute of Stress*

**The Top 10 Most Stressful Jobs**

1. Inner City High School Teacher
2. Police Officer
3. Miner
4. Air Traffic Controller
5. Medical Intern
6. Stockbroker
7. Journalist
8. Customer Service/ Complaint Worker
9. Secretary
10. Waiter

—*CDC*

“Anxiety is the space between the ‘now’ and the ‘then.’ ”  
—*Richard Abell*

Sixty percent of alcohol-related work performance problems can be attributed to employees who are not alcohol dependent, but who occasionally drink too much on a work night or drink during a weekday lunch.<sup>8</sup>  
—*The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence*

“The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.”  
—*Stephen Covey*

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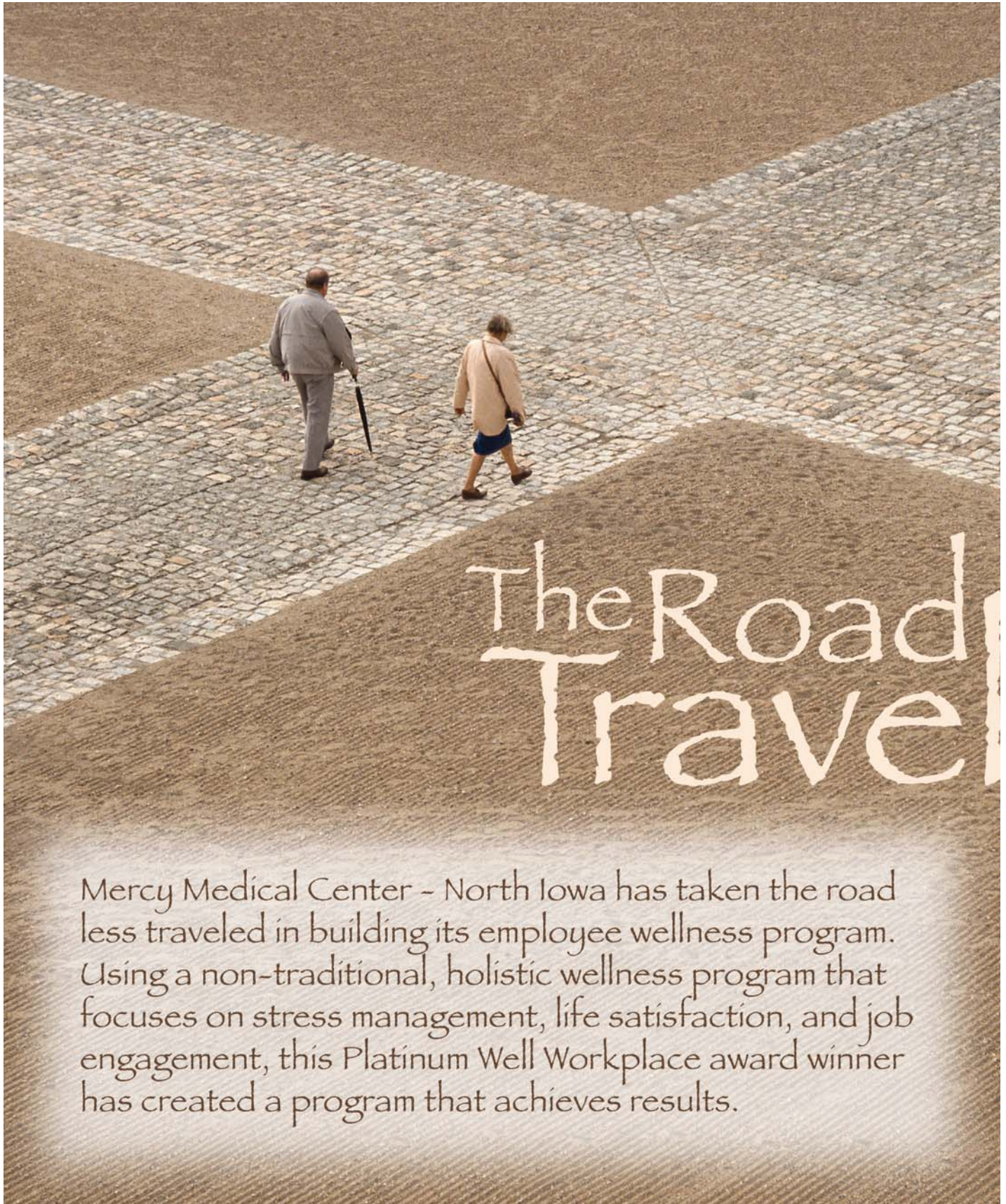
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**Suggested Citation:** Notable and Quotable. (2005). WELCOA’s *Absolute Advantage* Magazine, Special Stress Management Issue, 22-25.

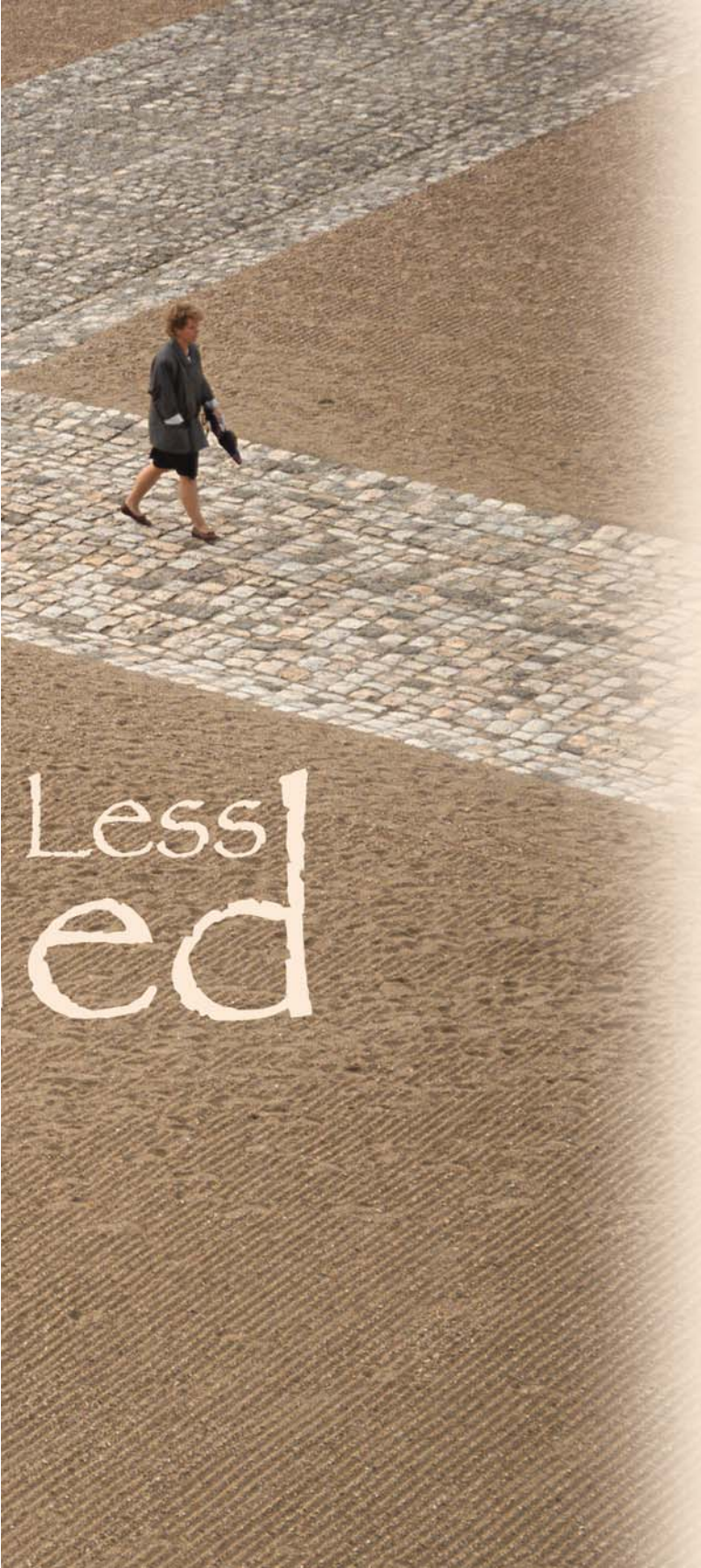




# The Road Travel

Mercy Medical Center - North Iowa has taken the road less traveled in building its employee wellness program. Using a non-traditional, holistic wellness program that focuses on stress management, life satisfaction, and job engagement, this Platinum Well Workplace award winner has created a program that achieves results.





**M**ercy Medical Center - North Iowa is a busy place. As the largest provider of health care services in a 14-county region—and the largest employer in Cerro Gordo County, Iowa employing 2,800 people—this private, not-for-profit healthcare center serves more than 100,000 inpatients and outpatients every year.

Mercy operates from several sites in Mason City, Iowa and is licensed for 350 beds. In addition to Mercy Hospital, the east campus of Mercy includes McAuley Forest Park Medical Building and Mason City Clinic. The west campus, also located in Mason City, includes a 30-bed skilled nursing unit, numerous ambulatory services, The Willows Retirement Center, Prairie Ridge Treatment Center, and Francis Lauer Youth Services.

Mercy also consists of Mercy Family Clinics, Mercy Home Care, and its subsidiary—Hospice of North Iowa. Mercy Family Clinics owns and operates numerous physician clinics in Mason City as well as in outlying communities, helping to ensure that people in those areas are assured access to high quality family physicians.

With all these programs in place designed to improve the health of the residents of North Iowa, Mercy knew its employees would also need leading-edge health and wellness services if they were to keep up the pace and fight stress and job burnout. As a result, Mercy, a WELCOA Platinum Well Workplace award winner, implemented a unique and progressive employee wellness program named Kailo (pronounced: Ky-low) in 1998. Kailo, an Indo-European word, means to be whole or “of good omen” and, because the Kailo program approaches health and well-being from a unique perspective, it’s the perfect moniker for Mercy’s non-traditional wellness program.

### ***If You Build It They Will Come***

The roots of Kailo date back to 1996 when Maxine Brinkman, Director of Mercy’s Women’s Service, assembled a task force to study how Mercy employees were thinking and feeling about their health. The multi-disciplinary task force conducted surveys, convened focus groups, and performed one-on-one interviews with staff members over the next two years in order to determine the best way to build a wellness program that resonated with Mercy employees.

After working with employees for several months, the task force revealed four major findings. First, Mercy employees were primarily concerned with psychosocial health issues—things like stress, depression, fatigue, relationships, and domestic violence. Second, employees wanted to feel valued in the workplace as people, not just as “workers.” Third, employees expressed a strong desire to “lighten up,” and have more fun at work. And finally, employees made it clear that their participation in wellness programs would depend to a large degree on the provision of company-paid time to do so, and the full support of their supervisor.

With these four issues in mind, the task force set out to answer another key question—what was the state-of-the-art in worksite health promotion programming, and could they use it as a model for their own program? After analyzing several worksite wellness programs, the task force came away empty-handed. The majority of the traditional wellness programs they studied were:

- ✓ Focused only on bio-medical risk factor reduction through a promotion of behavior change strategies
- ✓ Underutilized by employees
- ✓ Underfunded
- ✓ Understaffed
- ✓ Lacking in formal planning and evaluation
- ✓ Lacking in meaningful outcomes

Without question, these traditional worksite wellness programs were not good models for Mercy—they needed a program that addressed health and well-being from a more holistic standpoint—a model that defined good health as more than just an absence of disease. Unfortunately, there weren't many models for this type of program. If Mercy administrators wanted a program of this type, they would have to build it from the ground up.

As a result, leaders at Mercy set out to create a program that addressed the

specific needs and interests of employees—a program that would demonstrate respect, dignity, and concern for the health and well-being of employees and their family members, and draw from non-traditional resources to create a holistic wellness culture for employees.

### **Kailo is Born**

Administrators opted to bring four major initiatives into convergence at Mercy to create a highly-customized approach to corporate and individual health. Those four initiatives remain strong to this day. They are: Service Excellence, Organizational Development, the Gallup Training and Q12 Assessment Process, and The Kailo Concept itself. Let's look at each initiative in more detail.

**Service Excellence.** Acting as the umbrella for its approach, Mercy's Service Excellence initiative is modeled after the work of Quint Studer, CEO of The Baldrige Award-winning Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Florida, and President of The Studer Group. Studer has repeatedly demonstrated success in improving quality and customer service in healthcare by focusing on leadership development and employee relations.

Since its kick-off in 1998, Mercy's Service Excellence initiative has been focused on the vision of providing "Exceptional Quality, World Class Service" to its patients, customers, and employees. To this end, Mercy has created organizational standards of behavior for colleagues and leaders,

developed a comprehensive leadership development program with a heavy emphasis on building the relational skills of leaders, implemented a formal process for rewarding and recognizing excellence among colleagues, and made significant improvements in its customer service efforts as measured by patient satisfaction surveys.

**Organizational Development.** When it comes to the continual development of healthy capacities at Mercy, a team consisting of representatives from Human Resources, Employee Health, Kailo, Continuing Education, and Leadership Development shoulders the load. This team has outlined a three-year organizational development plan with four main goals. These goals include:

1. Creating a workplace culture that encourages employee engagement at all levels
2. Integrating Mercy's values and mission through educational offerings that continue to improve the knowledge and skills of colleagues
3. Enhancing organizational development through the North Iowa Mercy Network
4. Becoming North Iowa's employer of choice

With its main emphasis being to drive Mercy Medical Center to the "next level" of employee health and organizational development, the organizational development team has created *The Inside Track*, a multidisciplinary approach to retaining talented employees, as well as the *You are Mercy* and *You are Appreciated* initiative, which focuses on employee recruitment and recognition. This team also acts as an advisory and planning team for Mercy's leadership development series.

**Gallup Training and Q12 Assessment Process.** Mercy adopted The Gallup Organization's training tools and Q12 Assessment in 2001. Gallup's approach to organizational development is based on their landmark study of over one million employees across the US which indicated that engaged employees are key to business success, relationships play a key role in employee engagement, and strong workplaces are created by focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses.



*Kailo, an Indo-European word, means to be whole or "of good omen" and, because the Kailo program approaches health and well-being from a unique perspective, it's the perfect moniker for Mercy's non-traditional wellness program.*



The long-term objectives of Mercy's work with Gallup are to understand the dimensions of employee engagement that consistently drive business outcomes as well as to build a stronger workplace. The team at Mercy has set its sights on—and will claim success when—they reach the 90th percentile of employee engagement of all healthcare organizations represented in Gallup's database.

**The Kailo Concept.** As mentioned before, Kailo's mission and vision focuses on honoring relationships and purpose and meaning in life. The team at Mercy understands that these areas of focus can work as primary determinants of overall health and well-being, and that they have obvious tie-ins to Service Excellence, Organizational Development, and the Gallup employee engagement model.

Kailo plays a key role in shaping the health of Mercy's future not only through health and wellness programs and services, but also through significant contributions to the other three major initiatives currently taking place at the organization. For example, the Kailo program provides leadership on the *Create and Develop Your Leaders* team as

well as on the *Standards of Behavior Service Excellence* and *Organizational Development* teams. Kailo also rounds out several other programs and initiatives in both tangible and intangible ways.

### The Big Payoff

When taken together, this multi-dimensional approach to improving health and wellness is extremely effective for Mercy and the Kailo program. In an era when health promotion programs (and health promotion practitioners) are being asked to justify their existence and expenditures nearly every day of the week, the program at Mercy is demonstrating a substantial and enviable return on investment (ROI). Just consider the positive impact that has been achieved through a few of the programs ongoing at Mercy.

**Q12.** Over the past 25 years, The Gallup Organization has interviewed over one million employees working in American business and industry asking them hundreds of questions on every conceivable aspect of their workplace. After sifting through 100 million questions worth of data, Gallup concluded that the country's most successful organizations—those that have high profitability, high productivity, and high employee loyalty—also have high

levels of employee engagement.

Gallup defines an engaged employee as someone who "is in the right role, is consistently productive in that role, and is psychologically fully committed to bringing their best efforts to bear in that role." Based on its research, Gallup now rates employee engagement on a set of 12 questions that determine the likelihood of an employee staying fully committed, and working to advance the business interests of the organization. Mercy employees score quite well.

Compared to other healthcare organizations in Gallup's database, Mercy scored in the 68th and 70th percentile respectively in its 2001 and 2002 Q12 Assessments in overall employee engagement. Mercy's percentage of "extremely satisfied" employees also increased from 18 percent to 23 percent during the same time period. The by-proxy cost-savings associated with this improvement (due to a reduction in lost workdays due to disengagement) was estimated at \$160,296.

**Life's Odyssey.** Typically, traditional models for worksite health promotion measure success in terms of changes in behavior and/or reductions in biomedical risk factors for disease. While this measurement philosophy works well for

Because sometimes life isn't a group activity...

We'd like you to join us.

**The original Bootstrap Theory**

"You'll be fine. You just need to pull yourself up by your bootstraps."

Eighty percent of depression is treatable - but not with bootstrap theories. Well intentioned as they might seem, these feel good phrases and the get-a-grip attitude that sometimes accompanies them are an ineffective strategy for dealing with depression. It's time we moved Beyond Bootstraps. Learn how to really help when someone you know is depressed.

*Kailo offers a number of one-on-one initiatives designed to help employees cope with stress, depression, anxiety, relationships, and other personal issues.*

most traditional programs, Mercy decided early on that it was more consistent with its holistic philosophy to base its outcomes on changes in perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, and to measure success not on risks reduced, but on strengths bolstered.

Using Karen Carrier's Life's Odyssey as its primary tool, Mercy has collected information as to how its employees' perceptions of their health have improved since the inception of the Kailo Program in 1998. Life's Odyssey is a 70-item, self-scoring questionnaire that asks participants to rate on a 5-point Likert Scale, how they are thinking and feeling about their health in seven dimensions. These seven dimensions include:

1. Life and health attitudes
2. Social connectedness
3. Emotional well-being
4. Rest
5. Pleasure and play
6. Purpose and meaning
7. Self-Care

A comparison of Life's Odyssey median scores in 1998, 2000, and 2002 shows a positive trend line in each of the seven dimensions indicating that Mercy employees are thinking and feeling more positively about their health and life satisfaction.

From a risk perspective, data suggests that Mercy employees are fairing better than they were in 1998, too. A comparison of "high-risk" employees—those that score below 30 out of a possible 50 points in four or more dimensions of the Life's Odyssey questionnaire—indicates

there are fewer employees experiencing high levels of psychosocial and spiritual distress now than ever before. And although proper ROI measurement techniques fall short in capturing the value of this shift, even the sternest ROI scientists would have trouble arguing that this shift pays big dividends.

**Beyond Bootstraps.** Another example of Kailo's impact on the health of Mercy employees is its depression initiative, *Beyond Bootstraps*. Mercy's 2000 data showed a 12 percent overall prevalence of depression among employees. When measured again in 2002 there was no statistically significant reduction in overall prevalence rates; however, Mercy was able to show success in eliminating depressive symptomology on a case-by-case basis for 42 individuals that accessed depression-related services.

Using figures from benchmarking studies on the costs of depression, Mercy was able to estimate cost benefits in reduced healthcare claims and increased productivity for each employee that reduced depressive symptoms. Knowing that the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) estimates that depressed employees generate approximately \$3,200 a year in medical costs, and non-depressed employees generate only \$1,700, Mercy estimates that those 42 individuals who eliminated their depressive symptomology saved the organization about \$1,500 each in reduced healthcare claims.

Additionally, using information from Harvard researcher Dr. Ron Kessler, Mercy also estimates that they saved

between \$182 and \$395 per month in lost productivity for each of the 42 individuals who eliminated depressive symptoms. When taken together it can be estimated that by reducing or eliminating depressive symptoms in 42 individuals, Mercy has saved between \$154,728 and \$262,080 in lost productivity and healthcare claims!

In addition to these demonstrable outcomes, Mercy is hopeful their efforts in meeting the health and wellness needs of their employees will assist them in weathering a nationwide nursing shortage. And so far, at least on an anecdotal level, it seems to be helping.

"It's helped me see my patients as spiritual beings and not just a diagnosis. It's improved my family life and helped me live healthier," said Cindy Connor, a nurse who has worked at the hospital for 16 years.

"Frankly, I've looked at other hospitals to relocate, but I haven't found a program like this," she added. "It's a big factor in why I'm still here."

### **Bringing It All Back Home**

Without a doubt, the Kailo program at Mercy has been able to generate some positive financial impacts. But return on investment has never really been the point of the Mercy wellness program. In fact, it could be argued that the reason the Kailo program has been so successful, and attained a measurable ROI, is because its focus is elsewhere. Its focus is on creating a program that matches the culture, and meets employees with a sense of wholeness, sensitivity, and connectedness.

No doubt Mercy will continue down the road less traveled, offering employees the opportunity to improve their health and well-being through programs that focus on stress management, life satisfaction, and job engagement. In the years to come this Platinum Well Workplace will be an organization to watch as it incorporates some of the most cutting-edge philosophies in both business and health to build a corporate culture that treats employees with compassion and respect. ★



*The Kailo staff, pictured at a Wellness Conference in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.*



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WELCOA provides worksite wellness products, services, and information to thousands of organizations nationwide. For more information visit [www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org).

**Suggested Citation:** The Road Less Travelled. (2005). WELCOA's *Absolute Advantage* Magazine, Special Stress Management Issue, 26-31.



# Kailo's Six Lessons

*Kelly Putnam, Health Promotion Coordinator at Mercy Medical Center - North Iowa, reveals six key lessons learned while building a Platinum Well Workplace.*

I have had a rare opportunity to create and implement a non-traditional concept in worksite wellness with the Kailo program at Mercy. I did not set out to create something so different. I was led there by listening to my customers—the 2,800 people who work at Mercy, by doing lots of self-study, by learning from my colleagues who come from disciplines outside my own, and by honoring my intuition.

As a result, my definition of health, my ideas about what makes someone well, and the way I practice health promotion have changed dramatically since I came to Mercy in 1997. With that in mind, here are six practical, real-life lessons learned in the trenches of worksite wellness.

## **Lesson #1:**

The definition of health is so much more complicated than the simple absence of disease as I learned in my traditional training. I have adopted David Morris' definition of health as "the manner in which we live well despite our inescapable illnesses, disabilities, and trauma." What this definition says to me is that:

- Healing and wellness are possible even in the presence of disease;
- Psychosocial and spiritual distress are possible even in the absence of physical disease;
- None of us escape challenges to our well-being, no matter how "healthy" our lifestyles.

## **Lesson # 2:**

Changing behavior is far less important in worksite health promotion than I once believed. I owe a debt of gratitude to Jon Robison, PhD, MS, for his work on behavior change and health promotion. Robison believes that far too much emphasis is put on getting people to change their behaviors in

order to live healthier lifestyles. This focus is misplaced, he says, because (1) behaviors are very difficult to change, especially in the long term; (2) behaviors get far too much credit in predicting health and illness; and (3) behaviors are many times a symptom of a deeper, underlying issue. What's more, when health promotion practitioners base their outcomes on behavior change, they are setting themselves up for failure—and when the failure rate is high, so is professional burnout.

## **Lesson #3:**

Psychosocial and spiritual issues are far more important in worksite health promotion than I ever imagined. When I left graduate school, I was prepared to implement an employee wellness program with all the traditional trappings—cholesterol screenings, blood pressure checks, weight management classes, exercise programs, etc. What I learned from listening to Mercy employees was that they weren't interested in that kind of program. They were far more concerned with stress, depression and anxiety, fatigue, relationship issues, and even domestic violence.

This news was very disconcerting to me. I felt my training was sorely lacking in how to address these kinds of issues. I found a book that was extremely helpful that I would recommend to anyone in a helping profession, especially my colleagues in health promotion. The book is *How Can I Help?* by Ram Dass. Dass' book led me to Lesson #4.

## **Lesson #4:**

Health promotion is more about who you are than what you do. Ram Dass says, "We can, of course, help through all that we do. But at the deepest level we help through who we are." Dass

also stresses the importance of health professionals being aware of and working on their own issues. He says, "We work on ourselves, then, in order to help others. And we help others as a vehicle for working on ourselves." Admittedly, this sounds a bit esoteric, but I have come to believe this is the most important lesson I have learned.

## **Lesson #5:**

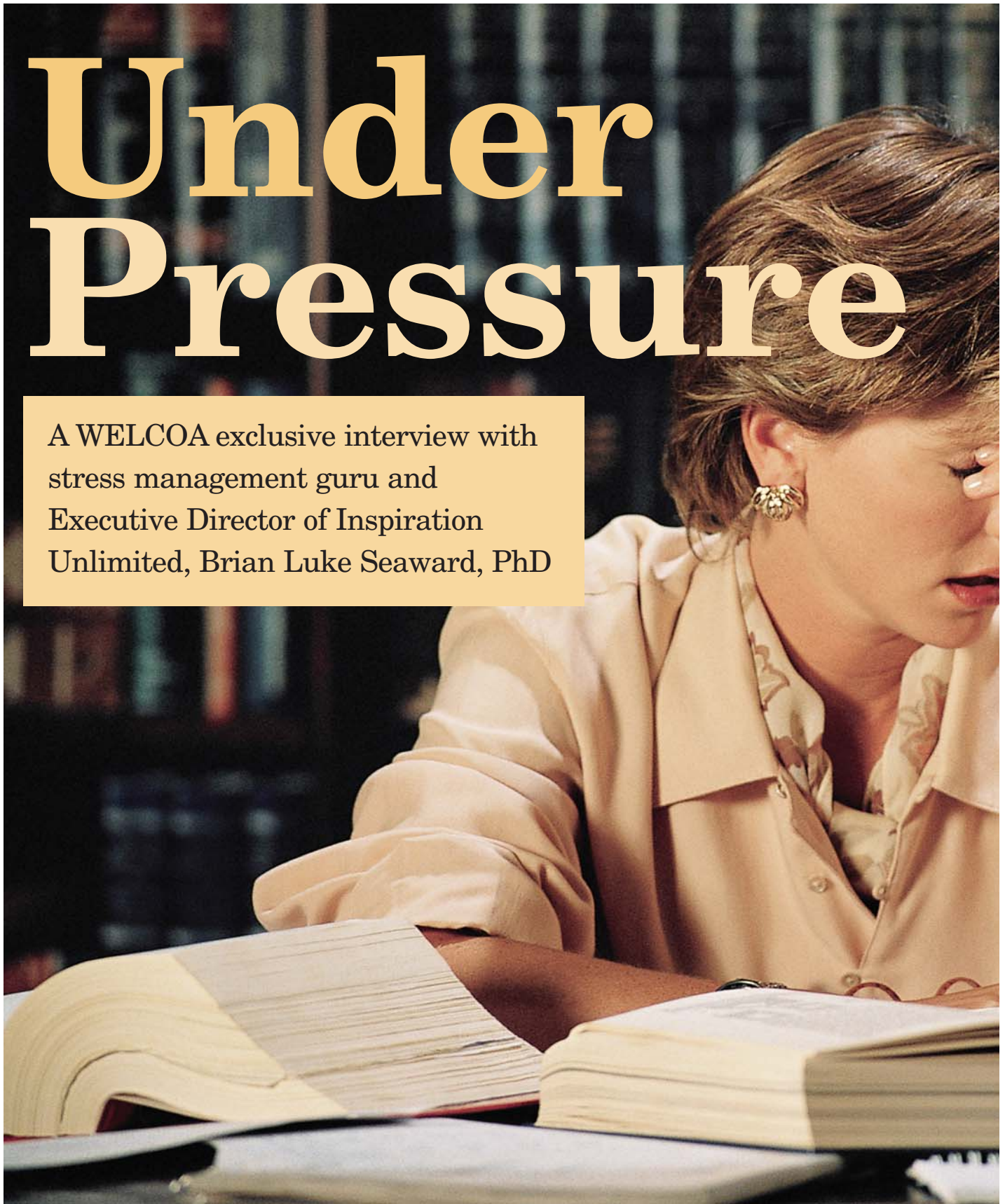
People will trust in you if you trust in them. When Kailo first began, it didn't exactly receive a warm welcome from all Mercy employees. Many staff were angry that Mercy had dedicated precious budget dollars to a "stupid wellness program." In the first year of the program, we were on the receiving end of much sarcasm, eye-rolling, and even hostility. But we kept going out and doing our programs, visiting staff in their units in the middle of the night and eventually, they came around. We never asked for anything in return. Our message was simply, "Take from Kailo what makes sense for you, and leave the rest." Today, 76 percent of employees view Kailo as a valuable benefit of working at Mercy.

## **Lesson # 6:**

The key to long-term success in worksite wellness is integrating with other organizational efforts to impact the work culture and continually demonstrate how your efforts impact the company's business objectives and mission. Kailo has survived three CEOs in its brief five-year history. With each change in leadership, the challenge was to find out what business objectives were priorities for each CEO, and demonstrate how Kailo could contribute to achieving those objectives.

# Under Pressure

A WELCOA exclusive interview with stress management guru and Executive Director of Inspiration Unlimited, Brian Luke Seaward, PhD







Recently Dr. David Hunnicutt, President of the Wellness Councils of America, sat down with Brian Luke Seaward, PhD, national stress management expert and renowned author of *Stressed is Desserts Spelled Backwards*, *The Art of Calm*, and the forthcoming, *Quiet Mind, Fearless Heart*, to discuss setting boundaries, achieving balance, and staying cool in a stressed out world.

### Luke, from your perspective, what exactly is stress?

**SEAWARD:** There's no one definition, but there's a consensus among professionals in the field that stress is a perceived threat—real or imagined—to one's mind, body, spirit, or emotion.

### Is stress really harmful if left unchecked?

**SEAWARD:** Absolutely! Stress kills. There's a boatload of evidence revealing that about 80 to 85 percent of all disease and illness is not only stress related, but that there is a stress-related causal factor in this—meaning simply that stress causes illness and disease. Of course that relates to healthcare issues at the worksite.

When speaking of the negative health effects of stress, it's interesting to note that the stress response (fight or flight) revolves primarily around physical threats and dangers. But today, we're seeing very few physical threats—terrorism notwithstanding. So our physical response to stress is very antiquated because about 99 percent of our stressors today are mental, emotional, and spiritual, yet our bodies respond as if they're all physical.

### If stress has so many profound impacts on disease and human health, why is it not often listed with physical inactivity, tobacco, and poor nutrition as a leading health risk?

**SEAWARD:** I think it's such a huge factor that we tend to overlook it. It's nebulous in the sense that it stares us in the face, but we can't see it because it's so huge. But the signs and symptoms are everywhere, from decreased productivity due to absenteeism, to increased health problems ranging from cancer, to heart disease, to hemorrhoids. You name it—the symptoms are evident everywhere.

### It seems like some people—especially in the business environment—really seem to thrive on stress. What's that all about?

**SEAWARD:** Well, there's good stress and bad stress. Good stress is that which is motivating, invigorating, and challenging. Lots of people use this type of stress to get things accomplished. Take Lance Armstrong, for example. The Tour de France is incredibly stressful, yet Lance Armstrong rose to the occasion to become the hero of the Tour de France five years in a row. He met the challenge. He's an example (though extreme) of someone who used stress as a motivating factor to accomplish a goal, and this is quite admirable.

But there's only one Lance Armstrong. The vast majority of people make their living at the worksite, and what we're seeing today is that stress at the worksite is synonymous with change. Change is everywhere at work, whether it's stock reports, mergers, acquisitions, downsizing—the list is endless. This type of change at the worksite makes people feel very vulnerable and, at the same time, feel as though they have no sense of empowerment. To revisit the Lance Armstrong example, these individuals can't just “peddle faster,” and change brings about an incredible amount of negative stress.

So the real challenge today is to help people learn to adapt to change. With that adaptation comes a sense of empowerment. If people feel more empowered, they're likely to experience less negative stress. They feel like they have control—they're not just passive victims in a careless world.

### How do people begin to manage change and feel empowered during times of stress and change?

**SEAWARD:** Setting boundaries really helps. One of the big changes I see today is people setting more boundaries between work and home, and freedom and responsibility. In general, there's a real lack of boundaries in our world today.

Look at technology for example. It's wonderful, but it can cause extreme stress. In the wrong hands or at the wrong time of day, technology can be very problematic. Technology is supposed to serve our best interests, but we're not supposed to be slaves to it. It's well documented that people are now addicted to things like cell phones and e-mail and laptops because they feel they always have to be connected. Talk about not having boundaries! Keeping pace with this 24/7 mentality of accessibility is like running at a sprint speed for an entire marathon, and no one can do that successfully. Simply stated, it causes burnout!

### How do people consciously set boundaries? What's involved in boundary setting from an individual perspective?

**SEAWARD:** People first need to acknowledge that it's important to have healthy boundaries. Once they do that, they need to realize that boundaries are rooted in values. What do we value that's important in life? Health? Education? Family? Privacy? Love? Freedom? Responsibility? These are all a part of the fabric of what makes up healthy boundaries.

We set boundaries with these values in mind. For example, someone may set a boundary that they're not going to check their work email from home because, from 5:30 until bedtime, it's important to pay attention to their family.

Right now in America we're seeing really poor boundaries in terms of finances, relationships, behaviors, etc. But if people can see that they need to set boundaries for their own good, then they can begin to create and implement them.

It's vital that these boundaries be put into play on a daily basis.

If an individual creates boundaries, but doesn't abide by them, then they get walked on—by their boss, by their friends, by everyone. When that happens, people begin to feel violated and victimized which leads to more fear, more anger, and more stress. It leads to an unbroken cycle of stress, and it's a dysfunctional, never-ending cycle.

### Can the typical working American effectively manage their boundaries? Do they have the resources to figure this thing out?

**SEAWARD:** I think so, but it definitely takes willpower. Willpower is what I call one of the “muscles of the soul.” It's one of our inner resources that we use to overcome our problems, just like a sense of humor, patience, tolerance, or courage. Willpower is in that same family of muscles, and it needs to be exercised regularly.

Let's take television watching for example. In America, we have a serious lack of willpower when it comes to watching TV. In fact, the average American now watches between 20 and 40 hours of television a week. As one of my students correctly observed, that's nearly a full-time job!

When most people sit down at night to watch television, I don't think they say, “I'm going to get my quota of seven hours of TV watching tonight.” What they say is something like, “I'm going to watch *Friends*.” But then the television ends up sucking them in, and they watch it for the entire evening. A strong sense of willpower could help in that situation. After *Friends* you could just shut off the TV. There are more valuable things to do with your life.

### Are people more stressed today than they were 200 years ago? There were some serious stressors to deal with during the settling of this country. Is stress worse now?

**SEAWARD:** Every epoch in the history of humanity has had its own challenges—social challenges, wartime conquests, weather disasters, you name it. What's unique about today is that we are at a very challenging moment in the history of humanity. At no other point in the history of humanity have we seen this convergence of problems on the world stage—technology, global warming, terrorism, etc.—they're all working together to bring us to a boiling point.

This really is an opportunity for human beings to come together and rise to the occasion to address these problems. We need to reach our highest human potential, here and now. We have the resources within each and every one of us to solve the problems at hand, but what makes it difficult is that we're living in an age of fear. Fear is broadcast in the media, and if anyone saw the movie *Bowling for Columbine*, they know exactly what I'm talking about. Fear sells. What I often tell people is don't buy into it. Be strong. Our challenges can be addressed, if we stay centered and take the time to do so.



**“Think back to the days when our fathers were working. Company loyalty was very strong. People worked for companies for 20, 30, even 40 years and retired with a gold watch. Now corporate loyalty is a myth. In the end, people are more likely to get a kick in the butt than they are to get a gold watch.”**

### **What can corporate leaders do to start raising awareness around the issue of stress management at the worksite?**

**SEAWARD:** Leaders today need to lead by example because they are role models. They’ve got to demonstrate strong, healthy boundaries themselves. They’ve got to demonstrate the qualities of leadership that are lacking today (just look at Tyco and Enron as examples of what *not* to do). They need to revisit the whole idea of service—service in terms of providing motivation and inspiration for the people who work for them, as well as the customers and clients they serve.

That’s not to say that leaders need to create a stress-free environment. You don’t want to have a stress-free environment because it’s not very productive. People need to have some level of inspirational, healthy stress that’s kept in balance. If a leader can model what that looks like, it’s a good first step. It’s likely that sense of balance will eventually be emulated throughout the company.

**Environment can play a big role in whether people stay healthy or get sick. Sometimes I wonder if we’ve set up “toxic” jobs—jobs that cause stress and illness. What are your thoughts on that?**

**SEAWARD:** I definitely agree with that. And it’s not only the frenzied atmosphere of productivity to meet quotas for stockholders looking to get their next dividend payment. It’s also things like electromagnetic pollution from computers, and other

physically harmful substances that workers deal with on a regular basis. But that’s just the health side of things. A toxic environment leads to deteriorating corporate loyalty, too, both on the part of the employee and the company.

For example, think back to the days when our fathers were working. Company loyalty was very strong. People worked for companies for 20, 30, even 40 years and retired with a gold watch. Now corporate loyalty is a myth. In the end, people are more likely to get a kick in the butt than they are to get a gold watch. That’s if they stayed with the job for more than a few years to begin with.

### **We’ve talked about the CEO’s role in all of this. What can practitioners do to help employees deal more effectively with stress?**

**SEAWARD:** We need to not only reduce the symptoms of stress but also the causes of stress. As a culture, we are great at offering symptomatic relief, but as you know, if you don’t get rid of the causes, the symptoms soon reappear.

So I think we need to focus on the causes of stress and the perceptions that lead to it, rather than simply throwing out stress balls at lunch ‘n’ learns. This idea goes back to corporate values; it goes back to corporate integrity; it goes back to corporate loyalty. Employees need to feel that they are invested in the company at a deeper, more spiritual level if we are going to start addressing the causes of workplace stress.

There are some companies—not enough in my opinion—but there are some companies that have changed the old paradigm and said, “We can no longer attempt to satisfy shareholders’ financial expectations by any means necessary.” These companies are making a radical departure and saying, “If we put employee needs, boundaries, and loyalty first, the expectations of shareholders will be met many times over.” That’s an encouraging trend.

The Internet has played a big role in promoting this new paradigm. There is a wealth of information available on the Web about building healthy corporate cultures and healthy boundaries at the worksite. It all comes down to embracing what I call a “new ethic for a higher consciousness” at the worksite—having a healthy balance in terms of stress in the working environment.

### **Luke, let’s talk about anger for a moment. Anger is a chief emotion at the worksite, isn’t it?**

**SEAWARD:** Yes it is, and the reason goes back to employees feeling like the company is disloyal to them, or that they are being victimized and/or violated in some way—like they’re doing the work but not getting the benefit or recognition for it. We have a lot of unresolved anger issues in this country, and unresolved anger—every time—comes down to unmet expectations. Employers need to work with employees to set expectations and boundaries if we’re going to affect anger issues at the worksite in any meaningful way.

**In your books, *Stressed is Desserts Spelled Backwards* and *Stand Like Mountain, Flow Like Water*, you've done a great job at putting stress into terms that people can actually use and understand. Can you tell us about the kinds of things you do in your own life to stay balanced?**

**SEAWARD:** I get up every morning and walk my dog, which is my combination of exercise and pet therapy. When I get back home I meditate for half an hour. For me, meditation is just a means to calm the mind. It's not any kind of religious thing, although it conjures up those images for some people. The best analogy I've heard for meditation is that it's like deleting unwanted e-mails from your computer. And that's exactly what you're doing—you're cleansing your mind.

I also swim or run every day. I love exercise. I also pay very close attention to the foods I eat, because we live in a country right now that has the largest variety of foods anywhere, and yet the worst quality of food in terms of containing synthetic substances like herbicides, fungicides, pesticides, and fertilizers. We've got some real problems in our food supply today, so I eat organic foods only, which is something I'd advocate for everybody.

Humor is also important to me. I like to think I have a sense of humor, and I use it as a coping technique. Whether it's reading funny e-mails and jokes, or sending a few to my friends, I think humor is important.

I also have to tell you that I'm a big fan of prayer. I think prayer is a wonderful coping technique. I believe that not acknowledging the spiritual dimension in life contributes to overall dysfunction in the world. So my spiritual practice in stress management is very important to me and prayer is part of that. All of these habits are part of the healthy boundaries I've set up for myself.

**If you could give one piece of advice to the typical working American, what would you tell them?**

**SEAWARD:** Get rid of your television. TV is human kryptonite. It's a tool to deliver the message of a lifestyle that most people either can't afford, or shouldn't have. TV is terribly addictive. If you are in denial about that, then I challenge you to turn off the television for a month and see if you can live without it. If you can't, then I rest my case.

Don't get me wrong—there are some wonderful things on TV. I'm a big fan of PBS. But in terms of what I would suggest for a healthy lifestyle, I think it's important to honor the integration, balance, and harmony of the mind, body, spirit, and emotions. In the application of that, it's essential that we take more time to explore our inner selves. If we can come to terms with the issues

and problems we have, we'll be better equipped to deal more effectively with stress. We can then maintain a better balance with our loved ones, friends, and community, because we're all connected as one big family.

**How do you think things will play out in the next 10 to 20 years? Are you optimistic about the future health of the American workforce?**

**SEAWARD:** I'm an optimist by nature, and I will say this: it takes a lot more work to be an optimist these days than it did 20 years ago!

Having said that, I'm disheartened by the news I hear about obesity in this country. I'm disheartened by the recent news from the American Cancer Society that soon, one out of every two people will come down with cancer. I'm definitely disheartened with the problem of workplace violence—even one incident of workplace violence is one too many.

But I have to tell you, I see great hope. I could be delusional; I'll be the first to admit that. But I'm a big fan of the work of Joseph Campbell, who was interviewed by Bill Moyers a number of years ago on PBS during his series called *The Power of Myth*. Joseph Campbell did a lot of work on what he calls "The Hero's Journey." "The Hero's Journey" can be summed up by acknowledging that we're all going to encounter problems in life, but we have the resources to deal with those problems if we put our minds to it. We have a number of stories to help guide us on our own journey—whether it's something as ancient as Ulysses, or something as contemporary as Lance Armstrong.

I may be an eternal optimist, but don't think I'm simply looking at life through rose-colored glasses. I really feel that when people encounter problems, they can rise to the occasion and make their lives, and the world, much better. ★

### **ABOUT: Brian Luke Seaward, PhD**

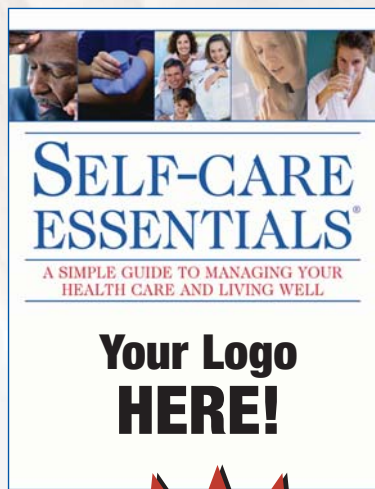
Brian Luke Seaward, PhD is a faculty member of the University of Northern Colorado and the Executive Director of Inspiration Unlimited. He is the author of several books including *Stand Like Mountain, Flow Like Water*, and *Stressed Is Desserts Spelled Backwards*. Dr. Seaward has shared the insights of meditation with the staff at the White House, taught stress management techniques with various heads of state, and coached relaxation techniques to several Olympic athletes, Broadway actors, media personalities, and leaders of several multinational corporations. He can be reached at [www.brianlukeseaward.net](http://www.brianlukeseaward.net)



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Suggested Citation: Under Pressure. (2005). WELCOA's *Absolute Advantage* Magazine, Special Stress Management Issue, 32-36.





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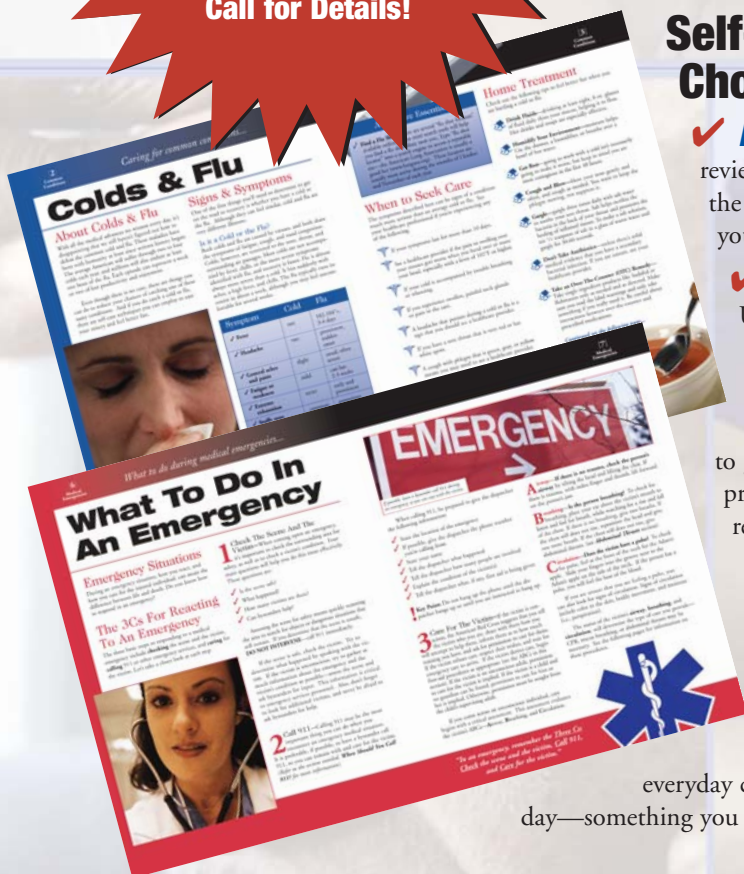
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# Stress Management

Stress has reached new heights in the United States. The convergence of a number of factors—longer work weeks, a sluggish economy, accelerating technology, and the ever-present threat of global terrorism—has begun to take its toll on corporate productivity and the spirit of the American worker. In fact, a recent Gallup Poll indicated that 80 percent of workers feel stress on the job, and nearly half say they need help in learning how to manage stress. In light of these facts, there has never been a better time to develop a proactive worksite stress management program at your organization.

But in today's environment, it's going to take a lot more than stress balls and pep talks to alleviate the strain and tension so familiar to most employees. In a modern business setting, stress management must be taken seriously, and it must be approached with creativity, planning, and true dedication—before the levee breaks.

This issue of *Absolute Advantage* is designed to deliver new and intriguing insights into worksite stress management programming. The 50 great ideas included here are real-life examples of programming that works, and they can be implemented right away. We've also included an exclusive interview with stress management expert Brian Luke Seaward, PhD, author of *Stressed is Desserts Spelled Backwards*, which will help you understand the forces at play when attempting to reduce organizational stress. You'll also find a case study demonstrating how one organization saved money as a direct result of helping employees reduce stress and find meaning and purpose in work and life.

No doubt, workplace stress has reached its boiling point, and employee health and continued business prosperity is at stake. It is up to employers to help workers find ways to relax, recharge, and unwind before it's too late. I hope you find this important issue of *Absolute Advantage* to be helpful as you answer this important call.

David Hunnicutt, PhD  
President

**PS.** To order additional copies of this issue of *Absolute Advantage*, contact the Wellness Councils of America at 402-827-3590 or go to our website at [www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org).

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