

Managing Sales Stress

An easy program any sales manager can begin. "Must Take" vacations. Physical programs. Ban smoking. Limit overtime.

If you are sincerely interested in the well-being of your staff and impressiveness of the bottom line, stress management consultants say your choice of action is the same.

Look at your salespeople. Are they driven, compulsive, anxious, uptight? Are they so aggressive in making their goals that they block out their personal lives?

If so, watch out, says stress consultant Layne Longfellow of the Institute for Human Skills in Prescott, AZ.

Hard-boiled, hard-charging salespeople may produce for this quarter and the next, but they're headed for burnout, and the station is the ultimate loser.

Longfellow is one of numerous advisers today who help companies reduce stress. Some can be found as close as the local telephone directory. There are alcohol-abuse programs, relationship therapists and stress counselors in almost every area.

The hardest part simply may be getting started.

Type A's should be watched closely. They're candidates for burnout. "Companies have got to learn that long-term productivity requires taking care of

the body, mind and soul," Longfellow says. "Type A's flame very brightly but they are not good for the organization over the long haul."

Work is the addiction for adults. Americans typically equate success with a state of hyper-arousal.

The chain-smoking, coffee-gulping, near-frantic salesperson may be pathetic, but the image still exerts a powerful influence on those seeking a role model.

"There's a sharp and radical difference between hard work and tension," he says. "The thing that I try to do in my work is unhook the connection between productivity and tension."

Longfellow offers down-to-earth advice for dealing with the problem.

■ **Start a program to deal with drug and alcohol abuse.** If a manager draws a blank on how to do this, there ought to be referral agencies in the telephone book that can help.

■ **Begin a "wellness" program at work.** L. L. Bean in Freeport, Maine, the outdoor outfitter, makes available for free all sorts of gear for their employees. Other companies pay for stress-reduction seminars to be held at the office. Many employers sponsor



Stress consultant Layne Longfellow has seen stress of all types – and has worked out a strategy to control it.

memberships at local health clubs.

Stations can lend out a station car. Trade out an "escape" weekend vacation and make it available to the stressed-out salespeople. East coast stations can enter their people in the Pritikin Fitness Program in Downingtown, PA. In New York City, the Cardio Fitness Centers could be worth a membership. Most major towns have such centers.

More ideas: dinners for two on you. Inter-station sports (not the kind where station plays charitable organization). This kind means you can let your hair down.

■ **Stack the diet in your employees' favor.** Many things are proven causes of high blood pressure and hypertension. Cigarette machines have been taken out of the offices and many employers have banned smoking or set up smoke-free zones.

Remove the salt shakers from the coffee area or cafeteria. Consider removing the candy machines and replacing them with machines that offer fresh fruit and vegetables. Offer selections of fruit juice and decaffeinated coffee and tea.

To stop smoking is the single most important thing anybody can do for their health. Sponsor a clinic to help smokers quit.

■ **Encourage employees to take advantage of weight-reduction plans.** There are many such programs listed in the directory.

■ **Don't look askance at employees who use relaxation techniques at work such as stretching or yoga.** Or, at least, encourage workers to take short breaks to dissipate tension as it accumulates during the day.

■ **Limit overtime.** It's easy to let excessive overtime endanger a marriage. Marital stress produces unwanted work stress.

■ **Insist that salespeople take their vacations.** When a good producer begins to look harried and overworked, urge him or her to take the afternoon off.

All this may seem far from the daily rush of radio sales. But Longfellow maintains it's only via this roundabout road that employees arrive at long-term success.

"The paradox is, they will be more productive over their long career if they will back off the tension, back off the pressure a little bit, take care of their bodies, maintain their friendships, maintain their health, maintain somehow their soul or their spirit."

But it's more likely to become a reality when the manager or sales manager takes the initiative. —By John Gallagher