

UPDATE: SUMMER 2006

Our newsletter contains updates on topical issues relevant to sustainable working practices, and is published quarterly. Back copies are available on our website. To join our mailing list, email us with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject box.

Recent research by the Health & Safety Executive, has revealed stress to be the biggest cause of working days lost through injury or ill-health, with an estimated 12.8 million lost days each year.

The Workplace Health & Safety Survey carried out towards the end of 2005 revealed 12% of employees found their job very or extremely stressful, while 39% thought the risk of stress could realistically be reduced. However, less than a third of employers had taken any sort of preventative action

The HSE had launched a dedicated work-related stress website with a discussion forum, information about free workshops and downloadable survey tools. For more information visit:

www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm

According to Les Worrall and Cary Cooper:

“Managers...need to take more personal responsibility for improving their health and as such this may require addressing their working hours and job design, as well as any direct health and fitness activities.

Stress management and employee wellbeing – issues to consider:

- **Are your organisational structures adding to the stress?**

Unrealistic expectations, unreliable technology and poor inter-departmental communications can all add to stress at work. Where they exist in your organisation, take steps to eliminate them.

- **Do your HR Policies support wellbeing?**

In addition to the Health & Safety policy, you need policies on Capability, Disability and Bullying and Harassment which support your efforts at stress management; together with a Performance Management System based on clearly defined outputs.

- **Can you offer more flexible working arrangements?**

Thus allowing employees more control over their work-life balance.

- **Relaxation training and massage therapies only alleviate physical symptoms.**

To help employees manage mental and emotional aspects of stress, consider Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or mindfulness training. Promote time management practices regularly (not everything will appeal to everyone) and watch out for the symptoms of stressed decision making.

For a fuller checklist of issues to consider in managing employee stress and promoting well being, send us an email with ‘Employee wellbeing’ in the subject box.

Directors and senior managers need to gain a better understanding of the impact of organisational change on their employees’ health and levels of productivity.”

The two professors made these key recommendations in a recent research report for the Chartered Management Institute.

Their analysis revealed that organisational change has an effect on the number of health symptoms reported by managers; and that 89% of managers had experienced some form of organisational change in 2005. Those experiencing high levels of stress factors such as low levels of control and unrealistic objectives reported lower productivity; while stress, respiratory problems and back pain emerged as the main causes of absence. Managers in the public sector were significantly more likely to report they were in poor health than any other sector.

There was also evidence that offering particular health benefits can reduce absence levels. Providing private health insurance reduced average levels of sickness absence by 2.86 days per employee per year. And while only around 10% of organisations offer nutritional advice and fitness coaching, these activities are associated with around 21% and 18% reductions respectively in psychological health problems.

Charity staff working with vulnerable clients need to become skilled at managing their own stress levels.

At Birmingham Women's Aid we used the Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) to identify major areas of stress in the organisation.

Developed by Cary Cooper (the famous "stress guru") and colleagues, this psychometric instrument considers four areas which interact to elevate stress. Individual results can be combined to give a picture of what is happening at the organisational level.

Based on the OSI, we were able to provide staff with personal feedback on managing stress more effectively, and to make recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

If you want to learn more about how HalsAllan could help your organisation address stress levels, please email us to set up an initial meeting without obligation on your part.

If you're female, juggling work and family keeps you healthier according to a recent article in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health.

The authors discovered that by the age of 54 women who had been partners, parents and employees were significantly less likely to report ill health than women who did not fulfil all three roles. Lead researcher Dr Anne McMunn commented:

"Women who combine work with children and marriage do have better health. While it may be stressful for them at the time, their long-term health is better when they have a combination of roles."

Green Gym – wellbeing the sustainable way

For those wanting to get fit while improving the environment the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers has come up with the concept of the Green Gym.

Not only will you become fitter and healthier, you'll also learn new skills such as tree planting, hedge laying, constructing Dry Stone walls and fostering rare plants.

With a mission "to promote fitness, well-being and health for everyone through physical work improving the local environment", Green Gym provides an interesting, open-air alternative to traditional fitness activities!

www.greengym.org.uk

We recommend:

'On Form' by Jim Loehr & Tony Schwartz, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London 2003 (ISBN 1-85788-325-X)

In the 21st Century the pace of life can seem rapid and relentless as we attempt to juggle the various aspects of our busy lives. According to the authors the solution is to manage energy, not time.

Loehr & Schwartz are performance psychologists who base their advice on 25 years' experience helping top athletes perform at their best under competitive pressure. They suggest you can revolutionise your life by recognising that although the number of hours in a day is fixed, the quantity and quality of energy available to you is not.

We all have access to various types of energy: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Managing these efficiently is the key to high performance, health and happiness – this book will show you how.

Facilitating flexibility through training:

HalsAllan works with clients to develop and implement sustainable working practices based on flexible working arrangements and harnessing technology in positive ways.

In addition to providing specialist consultancy advice and support, we offer an established portfolio of strategic flexible working, diversity and work-life balance workshops.

For employers wanting to offer greater access to flexible working arrangements, we're offering the following open workshops in 2006:

The Work-life Balance Workshop for Individuals is based on the latest research, and grounded in adult developmental psychology. This practical half day workshop introduces participants to life-career planning concepts, and shows how they can be used to manage personal work life balance.

Restructuring for better balance is a half day workshop developing skills for re-designing your workplace to take advantage of new and sustainable ways of working.

Work-life balance and HR strategy is a half-day briefing to guide participants through the process of integrating work-life balance programmes and HR strategy in support of 21st century working practices.

Details of our full portfolio of workshops - all of which can be tailored for presentation in-house - can be found on our website:

www.halsallan.co.uk