

# Stress Management Playbook (SAMPLE)

Moving Past **Stress** to  
**Energize & Excel** in  
Your Work

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# Introduction

I get it. **You are stressed out right now.**

In fact, stress levels at your organization may be at an all-time high. And as stress levels soar, you may be watching levels of employee engagement plummet. You and your team may be struggling to just to stay focused and productive.

**You are not alone.** According to a recent survey, over **9 out of 10 (94%)** of American workers are now **experiencing job stress.**[1]



Even before covid-19, the World Health Organization had classified **stress** as the **health epidemic of the 21st century.**[2] And while it would be foolish to say that workplace stress has had the same devastating impact as a global pandemic, it *is* fair to say that workplace stress has had its own long, slow burn on our physical and mental health.

You may be doing everything you can to avoid complete burnout, but you feel like you need some help. If so, I'm so glad you have picked up this resource. This document is a **SAMPLE** of the stress management playbook I created based on 25+ years' experience in stress research and certified coaching/advising. And if your team is overwhelmed and stressed right now, this playbook includes **research-validated best practices** to help you lead them, too.

If you follow the exercises in this playbook, you will create a detailed plan with **specific, actionable goals** for personal, professional, and organizational growth. I wish you the very best of success in this process.

Warmly,

*Pam*



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[1] <https://www.wrike.com/blog/stress-epidemic-report-announcement/>

[2] Ganesh, R., Mahapatra, S., Fuehrer, D. L., Folkert, L. J., Jack, W. A., Jenkins, S. M., Bauer, B. A., Wahner-Roedler, D. L., & Sood, A. (2018). The Stressed Executive: Sources and Predictors of Stress Among Participants in an Executive Health Program. *Global advances in health and medicine*, 7, 2164956118806150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2164956118806150>





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# Part 1 – Top Sources of Job Stress

**Workplace stress** comes from **two main sources**: 1) the **work** itself and 2) the **people** who do the work [3]. Of course, these are intricately linked. The systems and processes we use to do the work are, after all, designed by people. And when we get stressed out by work and deadlines, our relationships with others can become even more strained.

## POOR COMMUNICATION



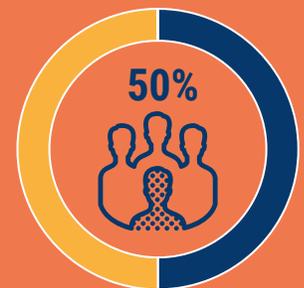
80% report feeling stressed over ineffective communication.

## POOR SUPPORT



60% feel their supervisors do not regularly check on their needs at work.

## POOR RELATIONSHIPS



50% report that poor relationships and poor teamwork cause stress.

## UNFORESEEN PROBLEMS



50% report feeling stressed over unforeseen issues and problems.

## UNREALISTIC DEADLINES



50% report that unrealistic deadlines cause stress.

## OVERLOAD & BOTTLENECKS



30% to 50% report that overload and office bottlenecks cause stress.

[3] Data from:

- Wrike: <https://www.wrike.com/blog/stress-epidemic-report-announcement/>
- Dynamic Signal: <https://dynamicsignal.com/2019/03/20/2019-employee-communication-and-engagement-study/>
- Korn Ferry: <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/articles/workplace-stress-motivation>



# Part 1 – Top Sources of Stress *continued*



## Part 1 Exercise: What are *your* work stressors?

1 Describe specific challenges you have in the following areas:



Communication



Relationships



Support



Unforeseen Problems



Deadlines



Overload/Bottlenecks

2 Think about your ideal work life, where each challenge has been successfully addressed. What would "ideal" look like? What would change?

3 In the next sections of this workbook, you will make a plan to address your work challenges. First, prioritize the list by asking the following questions about each one:

? What becomes possible if I successfully address this issue?

? How important is this issue to me personally and professionally? Give each a score on a scale from 1 (low importance) to 5 (high importance). This scale may seem counter-intuitive, but it will make sense when you calculate the priority score.

? How much effort will it take to reach the outcome I want? Give each a score on a scale from 1 (high effort) to 5 (low effort).



For each work challenge, multiply the importance and effort scores. This will give each a **priority score**.



List the work challenges from highest to lowest scores. The challenges with the highest scores on your list are highest priority.



**TEAM EXERCISE:** Consider doing these steps with departments, units, or teams that are struggling in specific areas. Come up with a prioritized group list of challenges to work on together.



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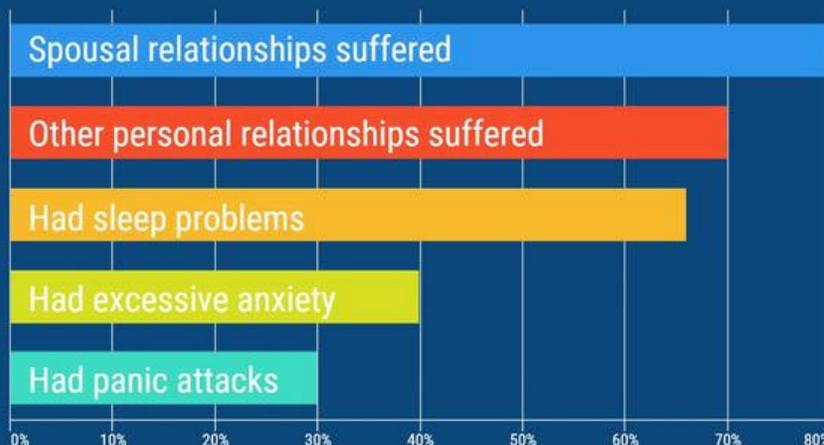
# Part 2 – Impact of Job Stress

## Results of Workplace Stress (Professional)



**REMEMBER** that job stress affects us **professionally...**

## Results of Workplace Stress (Personal)



...but also **personally**. The vast majority of workers say that job stress bleeds into their personal lives as well [4].

[4] Data from: Wrike: <https://www.wrike.com/blog/stress-epidemic-report-announcement/>



# Part 2 – Impact of Stress *continued*



## Part 2 Exercise: How has stress impacted you?

### 1 How is stress showing up in your **professional life**? Check all that apply:

- I have recently looked for other work
- I have taken unplanned time off from work
- I have burnout (loss of energy, time off (absenteeism) efficiency, and engagement in work)
- I have felt mentally checked out (presenteeism)
- I have experienced conflict or checked out breakdown in work relationships

### 2 How is stress showing up in your **personal life**?\* Check all that apply:

- Changes in eating/appetite
- Anger or short temper
- Changes in sleeping patterns due to upsetting thoughts or nightmares
- Conflict with spouse or other personal relationship
- Frequent aches and pains, stomach problems, ulcers, migraines, skin rashes
- Drinking or smoking more
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Trouble thinking or concentrating
- Feeling like you're dreaming or like you're numb
- Feeling scared, anxious, depressed

\*We often can't see these symptoms for ourselves, but those closest to us can. Consider asking some trusted friends what changes they have noticed in your lifestyle choices and behavior.

### 3 On a scale from one to ten, how high is your stress now?\*

\*\* 1-4: Low, normal 5-7: Moderate stress, may be cause for concern 8-10: High stress, get help!



**TEAM EXERCISE:** Take the stress temperature of your team by asking them the same questions. Collect the results and calculate the average stress level. You may also be interested in taking the [Maslach Burnout](#) and [Areas of Worklife surveys](#) available at [Mindgarden.com](#).





# Part 3 – Intro to Research-Based Stress Management

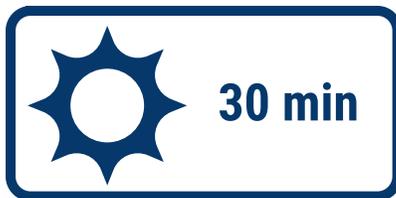
## 5 Health Habits We Should Use Every Day



Most need **7-8 hours of high quality sleep** per night. Less can make us feel tired and cranky, feeding into feelings of anxiety and depression.



We should all aim for **30 minutes to an hour** of moderate **exercise** per day.



**30 minutes of sun exposure** every day keeps our biological clocks working so we sleep well at night and helps us produce important brain chemicals.



**Take a break every hour.** The latest research suggests that 15 to 20 minutes every hour actually boosts productivity.



For a simple, **daily nutrition plan:**



Add **healthy proteins** to **2 meals** (lean meats, fish, beans and legumes)



Add **healthy fats** to **2 meals** (olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds)



Add **high-fiber, antioxidant-rich foods** to all **3 meals** (vegetables, fruits, and whole grains). All are required to make brain chemicals that help us think clearly and stabilize our mood.



## Relaxation Techniques

### Relaxation Breathing

Stress affects our breathing by tightening muscles in our chest, neck and abdomen. As our breathing becomes more rapid and shallow, we take in less air and release less carbon dioxide from the lungs. The resulting changes in oxygen and blood acidity can lead to feelings of anxiety and panic, sleep problems, unsteadiness, rapid heart rate, and poor concentration. When we calm our breathing, our oxygen and carbon dioxide levels can return to normal.

The following breathing exercise is used by high-stress workers in the military and police [6]:



### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Just like the stress response, we can also trigger a **relaxation response** to help us cool down in the wake of emotional stress. The relaxation response will re-balance the brain, helping us to think more clearly and act in ways that are the best interest of everyone involved. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)** is one of the most efficient ways to trigger a relaxation response [6]. The basic idea is a progressive tensing and relaxing of all major muscle groups. Give yourself about 30 minutes of uninterrupted time to do this.



[6] Schiraldi, G. R. (2017). *The Resilience Workbook: Essential Skills to Recover from Stress, Trauma, and Adversity*. New Harbinger Publications.





## Level 1 Stress Management Plan

- 1 What changes can you make to improve your physical and mental **performance** (level 1 stress management)?

Lifestyle area	What I need to start doing	What I need to stop doing	What becomes possible when I improve this area of my health?
Sleep			
Exercise			
Sun Exposure			
Relaxation, taking breaks			
Nutrition			

- 2 How can I make each of these changes a habit?
- 3 How will I reward myself for making these changes?
- 4 What challenges will I face and how will I address them? What boundaries will I need to set and with whom?
- 5 Who or what can help me achieve these goals?

 **TEAM EXERCISE:** Pick a lifestyle change that the entire team would like to work on together. Create a fun challenge out it and track the team's progress for a month. At the end, reward everyone for their progress and to positively reinforce the behavior. Then, pick another lifestyle change and repeat.



## Part 3– Research-based Stress Management *continued*

### Research-based stress management has 3 levels.

#### Self-care is important, but it's not the whole story.

In this sample of a larger playbook, I provided some important tips and tricks for what I call "level 1" stress management. At level 1, we care for our physical and mental health.

This is because a strong body helps create a strong mind.

But this is just the beginning of a solid stress management plan.

Want to learn more?

I would love to hear from you!



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