

Intro:

Most of the time, we discuss stress as a negative thing. However, not all stress is inherently harmful. Eustress can be a helpful experience that improves our confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills.

In this issue of the EAO newsletter, we will discuss ways that managers can harness the power of eustress to be more successful in the workplace.

What is the stress response?

When we face challenges, our bodies react through a stress response. Stress responses can differ from person to person, but they are all ways your body reacts to a threat (real or perceived) by immediately engaging internal systems needed for survival.

The stress response tenses your muscles, releases hormones, increases your breathing, and kicks your cardiovascular system into gear. Imagine you're being chased by a tiger. All the parts of this stress response would help you to survive.

This response is a normal and natural reaction to challenges or threats, but our bodies are not meant to stay in this state for a long time. To benefit from stress and become more resilient, we need to experience a clear end to a threat. To use the analogy above, we need to be able to "escape the tiger".

Many stressors at work are ongoing, and don't allow us to feel the relief of overcoming the stressor that triggered a stress response. However, there are ways that managers can better understand the ways that stress can impact employees and actively cultivate good stress in the workplace.

The Spectrum of Stress

We often view stress as an "all or nothing" status, but stress actually exists on a continuum.

At the two extremes, we have boredom and distress. Having no stress **sounds** nice, but it actually can be demotivating and discouraging. People experiencing no stress at all often feel unchallenged, unrecognized, and unmotivated. They can have the feeling of making no progress, and lose faith in their abilities if they're not being challenged to learn and grow. Employees who feel frustrated, bored, or stagnant often do not have high job satisfaction.

The other extreme is distress. When most people talk about stress, they're probably talking about "bad" stress, or distress. Distress is a situation where the stressors of work and life go beyond our ability to cope, and it can impact employees both mentally and physically. When our bodies are under stress for too long, we can become tired, irritable, avoidant, or distracted. We can be jittery, have trouble

sleeping, or generally feel unwell in our bodies. Distress can also lead to decreases in job performance and satisfaction.

In the middle, you see “eustress”, a term psychologists use to describe a positive form of stress. Eustress gives us confidence, builds our resilience, and can benefit our health, motivation, work performance, and emotional well-being. Examples include starting or pursuing a hobby, working toward a promotion, going on a first date, tackling a tough home repair, navigating unfamiliar technology, or preparing for a final school assignment or exam.

Eustress allows us to have a clear end-point or catharsis to our stress response. Through eustress, we can push outside of our comfort zones. It can build our self-esteem and teach us how to work more collaboratively and creatively. Eustress can also improve our ability to problem-solve and reduce our fear of facing challenges in the future.

How to cultivate eustress yourself and for the employees you manage:

Managers and supervisors can play a role in making sure that positive stress is more prevalent in the workplace. Here are some suggestions on how to promote eustress at work.

- **Learn ways to self-regulate under stress:** You can promote eustress in yourself by increasing your own ability to manage your stress response. If you’re experiencing a stress response, consider reaching out to employee assistance to get some practical tips on how to reduce stress through breathing, body awareness, and counseling support.
 - **At UW-Madison, the Center for Healthy Minds (link to website) has many resources that can help you to bolster your ability to regulate your mind and body under stress. Check out their free meditation and mindfulness app here:**
<https://hminnovations.org/meditation-app>
 - **To learn more about ways to manage stress and burnout, please see (EARLIER EAO NEWSLETTER ON BURNOUT- LINK).**
- **Prioritize learning and professional development:** many times, we experience eustress when we learn something new. It can be challenging and stressful at first to feel inexperienced, but as our skills improve, we become more confident. As a manager, consider ways that you can proactively encourage your team to keep learning and growing. By giving employees the opportunity to learn something new, you’re giving them the opportunity to experience eustress and become a more resilient member of your team.
- **Encourage your employees to take on realistic challenges:** An example of eustress at work could be taking on a new project that encourages you to leverage existing strengths (which can be incredibly energizing) and requires you to hone existing skills or learn new ones. Work projects that are challenging but realistic are great ways for employees to stretch their skills.

Identify places where employees would be able to tackle new challenges, and give them the support they need to be successful.

- **Frame events as challenges rather than threats:** A manager's attitude can go a long way towards reframing events at work. Adopt a growth mindset and encourage your team to work collaboratively to solve problems. Create a working environment where mistakes can be discussed and corrected without shame, so that employees feel more supported in overcoming stressors and turning bad stress into good stress.
- **Identify ongoing stressors for your team and remove obstacles:** are you finding that several employees on your team have been experiencing ongoing negative stress (distress)? Consult with an employee assistance counselor to learn more about ways that you can identify ongoing stressors and remove obstacles for your team. Employee assistance is experienced in supporting managers as they manage stressors in the workplace.

LifeMatters Webinar:

How to be an Ally to the LGBTQI+ Community Support Session

June 20, 2023, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

The LGBTQI+ community encompasses a wide range of sexualities and gender identities. This session focuses on increasing awareness and understanding of the LGBTQI+ community and effective ways to be an ally.

1. Click [here](#) to go to the Webex link.
2. Enter your name and email address.
3. Enter the session password: ghBYda6Rs39
4. Click "Join Now".