

Ask the Expert: Anne Russell, Coaching Northwest

Stress is one of the most common workplace illnesses affecting businesses today, and when times are tough it can become more acute than ever. Personal and corporate Life Coach, Anne Russell, joins COMMENT's [St. Helens Chamber of Commerce Journal] panel of experts to answer your questions on dealing with work related stress.

I am a small business owner in St Helens. I find myself getting increasingly anxious. How can I deal with the stress to make sure it doesn't interfere with my business?

I mentioned in a recent radio interview that being focused on the *positive* aspects really works – because what you focus on, keep your energies around, keep working at, keep talking about, keep thinking about – and therefore take action on – are the things that you will get more of! So if you are constantly speaking of how awful it all is, you will simply feel worse, do less, and create tension, worry and more anxiety.

You need to learn and recognise techniques that keep YOU, as boss, calm. There are a number of complementary therapies that can help you achieve this. For example, ensure a very good nutritious diet - there are foodstuffs I can guide you towards that improve mood and brain function. Stimulants merely increase the anxiety, instead learn some easy yoga/meditation, designed to de-stress instantly, which can be done any time of the day. Or take regular exercise, like walking, that improves endorphins – feel good factors so you can function in an upbeat manner. Also be aware and change any negative thinking into positive thoughts, which create positive action.

If you are calm and upbeat, your workforce will be confident in you.

To conquer fear, go out and get busy!

I employ 20 Staff, and it's only natural that they will be worried about the security of their jobs during these tough times. For the moment we're doing ok, but how can I motivate my staff and keep them positive?

Reward! Reward! Reward!

Speaking in a negative fashion, being moody, appearing anxious, fearful, tense, uptight give negative vibes that will continue to keep the staff nervous – and therefore, importantly not focused on their work.

However, by rewarding staff for good work, ideas, or attitude, they will feel part of the process and want to do well. Rewards do not have to be financial. Time in lieu, perhaps. Celebrate good work by notices etc. Or vouchers to use in the High Street, or in the company. Take time to have every one of them feel important to the whole. Give them personal encouragement, and the staff in turn will see why they *need and want* to be there, working hard. Survival of the fittest on all levels. Be visual, polite, positive, strong and confident. They will be motivated and copy this behaviour.

Include your employees in discussions about what can be done to make positive cut-backs, so that jobs can be kept, not lost. Ask staff to help find solutions, involve them in the difficulties.

Above all remember to stay calm, not shout or be agitated with staff or issues.

Give them a confident Big Picture to aim for when things turn around, and aim to lose superfluous cost and wastage naturally. This way the staff will care to work productively, determined to win through.

For further information on dealing with workplace stress or to arrange a private consultation about life coaching or holistic therapy for your business or yourself, contact Anne Russell:

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