



Boss burnout?

Running your own business can be stressful at the best of times. Domini Stuart tells us what can happen when the pressure builds and how we can deal with it.

It's no secret that stress can have a powerful impact on your bottom line. Workers' compensation claims for stress-related conditions now top \$200 million a year, while work-related stress accounts for the longest periods of absenteeism.

Many business owners are responding by instigating stress management programmes for their staff. But, according to Clinical Psychologist Greta Goldberg, they could be overlooking the most important factor in the equation – their own state of mind.

“It takes special qualities to run a successful business,” Goldberg says. “You need to be self-motivated, prepared to take risks and willing to shoulder a heavy burden of responsibility. But there's a fine line between being motivated and being a workaholic – or taking responsibility and being incapable of delegating.”

Whether you cross that line depends to a large extent on what's driving you to succeed.

“Many people hold on to the belief that the only way to avoid failure is to work harder. This kind of self-imposed pressure can be the most damaging.”

A build-up of pressure

So what happens when the pressure builds? “Depending on your personality type, you're likely to show one of three types of reaction to chronic stress,” says Goldberg.

- Emotional - increased anxiety; depression; panic attacks; aggression.
- Behavioural - excessive drinking or smoking; poor work performance; an obsession with trivial detail.
- Physical - increased blood pressure; heart rate and muscle tension; headaches; psychosomatic illnesses.

Typically, people at the top of an organisation are the last to acknowledge that they have a problem. In some cases, their health, relationships and business have to suffer irreparable damage before they're driven to seek help.

But stress isn't a price you have to pay for success. Stress can be managed, and Goldberg is passionate about encouraging everyone to take responsibility for their own state of mind.

"I realised that the people who claim they have no time for anything but work are the ones sitting up in front of their computers at three in the morning, unable to sleep," she says. "I thought a website might be the most practical way of grabbing their attention, as well as an easy, no-cost and non-threatening place for them to start. The result was www.psychelp-sos.com.au."

The stress of helping people relax

It is ironic that alleviating stress in others didn't protect Sharon McGlinchey from a stress crisis of her own.

She had just opened her first *mv* Radiance salon in Double Bay, where her clients enjoyed deeply relaxing facials and body treatments with massage, energetic healing, yogic breathing and creative visualisation.

Days spent in this tranquil oasis were fine - but her evenings were becoming a nightmare.

"I also produce my own range of organic skincare," McGlinchey explains "so I was effectively running a second business in my so-called spare time. I'd go home to a swag of internet orders, emails from suppliers and requests from retailers - not to mention the accounting and paperwork that go with any business."

She was working every night until the early hours, and then every weekend, too. "I was caught up in that vicious circle of being too busy to take a breath and see where I could do things differently."

When she found herself dreading going home every night, she knew something had to be done.

"My first step was to find a freelance book-keeper to take over my accounts," McGlinchey says. "That immediately took a huge weight off my shoulders. I then began training other therapists in my techniques so that they could work with clients while I incorporated the skincare business into my working day."

McGlinchey also began taking better care of herself – eating well, taking yoga classes, meditating and making time to relax with her husband and 8-year-old daughter.

“This was a good lesson to learn early on,” she says. “As both sides of *mv* have grown, I’ve stayed very aware of the need to manage my time and be realistic about how much I can do. It’s so obvious to me now that avoiding stress is not only better for me, it’s better for my business.”

Goldberg couldn’t agree more. “When the boss is stressed, it percolates right through the company,” she says. “That’s why the best and most economical way to manage stress in any organisation is to start at the top.”

Ways to manage your stress

- Recognise your personal needs and think carefully about your priorities. Do you really want business to be your whole life?
- If you’re most productive outside of regular working hours, it’s probably because there are fewer interruptions. Create the same opportunities for concentrated effort during the day by shutting your door, switching your phones to a message service and closing your email screen. If you find it hard to forgo instant communication, remember that dealing with all of your messages in one or two batches is also a sound time management strategy.
- Reinhold Niebuhr famously prayed for the serenity to accept the things he could not change, courage to change the things he could, and the wisdom to know the difference. This could be a mantra for stress management.
- Have fun. List all the things you really enjoy and try to do at least one every day.
- Eat well. It’s as easy to have a salad sandwich for lunch as a pizza – and, if you collect it yourself, you’ll be combining nourishing food with a little exercise and a break away from the office. Very healthy!
- If your doctor gives you the go-ahead, three 20-minute sessions of heart-pounding exercise a week is a great way to dissipate stress.
- Make sure you get enough sleep.
- Try meditation, massage, deep breathing or yoga – preferably every day.
- Don’t put off getting help if you need it. Talk to your doctor, call the Mental Health Foundation in your state or visit www.psychelp-sos.com.au
- Remember, stress is a result of how you respond to certain situations. You really can control how stressed you become.