

## Let Stress Guide You

Leadership can be stressful. But effective leaders use stress as a constructive force rather than allowing it to become a destructive one. Stress occurs when conditions produce awareness that some action is required to satisfy a need, to solve a problem, or to prevent some undesirable result. Without constructive stress, motivation would be at an extremely low level, and very little would ever be accomplished. Adopt the attitude that stress is a challenge to your creativity – a welcome opportunity to perform well.

Minimizing destructive stress requires planning ahead and setting priorities. A system for handling every part of the work cuts down on the number of decisions that must be made day by day, transforms many problems into automatic procedures, and makes sure there is an appropriate team member to handle most situations that arise.

### Managing by Goals

Clearly-defined goals and a written plan of action for both your work and personal life offer you these stress-reducing benefits:

- You always know where you are going and, therefore, feel little fear of the unknown.
- Obstacles are not perceived as threats because you have anticipated them and planned how you will handle them.
- Making choices is simplified because your goals serve as criteria.
- A written plan of action for achieving goals provides ready-made decisions regarding specific actions to take.

Overall organizational goals and plans simplify the leadership of people. The plan of action for achieving the goals of the organization provides standards and procedures for measuring individual and organizational productivity. You and your team members know automatically whether productivity is adequate.

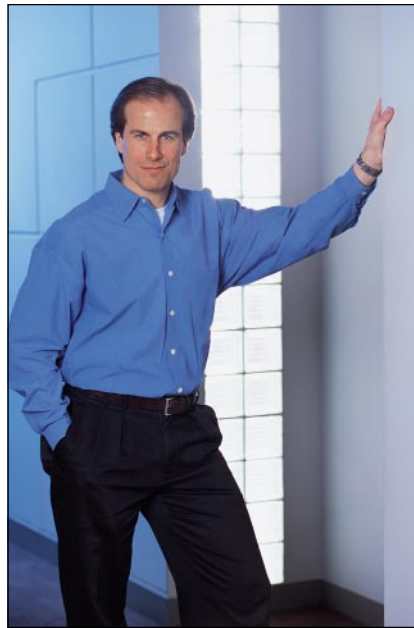
When productivity falls short, a goals tracking procedure shows exactly where the problem area is and points to corrections that can be made before it is too late to reach the goal. Stress-producing vagueness about what is wrong is eliminated. Instead, you and your team members know where you are going and how you intend to get there.

### Identifying Priorities

Determining priorities is a constant challenge. To minimize destructive stress, a working goals program outlines criteria for identifying priorities. The action steps for achieving the goals of the organization define which portion of the work is yours and what will be left to other people. One of

the most effective ways to choose which activities you will perform is to evaluate their cost. Determine the value of one hour of your time based on your annual income. When you know how much your time is worth, you have a better standard for choosing items of work you will perform personally and those you will delegate. Just as you would not be willing to pay \$100 for a cup of coffee, you should not spend \$100 worth of time accomplishing a five-dollar task. Compare the cost of your time to the worth of the activity.

Another approach to establishing priorities is to evaluate the contribution each activity will make to the achievement of organizational and personal goals. Focus on activities that make major contributions to moving you and your team members closer to your goals. If time is left, it may be invested in activities of lower priority.



### Keeping in Touch

One of the most stressful feelings an effective leader can experience is the fear of being out of touch with what is going on. It is the surprises that are devastating to organizational and personal productivity – not the anticipated obstacles. Eliminate stress by setting up an organized system for keeping in touch with your organization:

- ◆ Clearly defined procedures. All routine functions of the organization should operate according to clearly defined procedures. Clearly defined procedures reduce time needed for instructions, eliminate the necessity for repetitive decision making, and prevent overlooking important activities.
- ◆ Regular reports. Design reports that provide pertinent information about the status and operation of the organization. Link reports directly to the goals program to help with tracking progress toward goals. Design reports so that a quick summary is available along with whatever detailed back-up is necessary.
- ◆ Availability and accessibility. As the leader of your team, you supply the inspiration, direction, and support each person needs. No one else can assume this role for you. Your accessibility provides team members with the confidence to move ahead.
- ◆ Observation. Become an excellent listener and a keen observer. Learn to relate what you see and hear to your overall goals. You will quickly become expert in picking up hints of possible trouble spots before they actually materialize. Then you can take positive action to eliminate them before they create serious stress.