TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR SERVICE SANITY

Managing Stress, Problem Solving and How the Physical Setting Can Impact Service

CASFAA
California Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

Professional Connect
What Is Stress?

- To your body, anything that causes a change in your life can cause stress, good or bad.

- Even imagined change (worry) is stress. Things like changes in your daily routine and body health are stressful. Emotional stress can be caused by arguments, disagreements and conflicts.

- Do you push your body too hard? If so, your body may not be getting the time it needs to repair itself, to replace those used brain neurotransmitters. The result can be a feeling of running out of gas or lack of energy.
What Is Stress?

- **Having Stress?**
  - When high levels of stress occur, they interfere with the brain’s happy messengers. The internal clock stops working, sleep is disrupted, energy levels fall off, a lack of interest in outside things may occur and aches and pains may surface.

- At times, all or a majority of these symptoms may cause anxiety, panic attacks, muscle aches, upset stomachs and light-headedness.
Sleep can be affected by stress. Your body’s internal clock cycles when you rest, and **Serotonin** is one of the “happy messengers” that helps regulate your body’s clock. If stress causes the **Serotonin** levels to drop, the clock stops working properly and you may not be able to obtain restful sleep.
Energy

Energy levels are affected by changes in the body’s Noradrenalin (another happy messenger), a cousin of Adrenalin.

Proper functioning of Noradrenalin is essential for you to feel energized.

Without enough Noradrenalin in the brain, you can feel tired, exhausted, and lethargic.

Stress can cause malfunctioning of Noradrenalin.
Pain and Pleasure

Pain is influenced by Endorphins, natural morphine-like chemicals in our bodies. Dopamine, another happy messenger, is found in the brain close to where Endorphin is released.

When Dopamine function slows, Endorphin function also slows, reducing the body’s natural painkiller.
Dopamine

- Dopamine also runs the body’s pleasure center in the brain. When stress occurs, it can reduce the function of Dopamine.
- Activities tend to lose their pleasure and things become painful.
When there is too much stress, a chemical malfunction in the brain can occur resulting in **OVERSTRESS!**

- **Binges**
  Binges can result with the use of either pick-me-up’s or put-me-down’s. Often the use of substitutes for reduction of stressors, in fact, causes us to take on more stress since we “feel much better” now.

- **Pick-Me-Up’s**
  Often, we use pick-me-up’s such as sugar, caffeine, alcohol, your own adrenaline (workaholic, shopping and gambling sprees, thrill seeking hobbies), drugs and tobacco for temporary relief.
Put-Me-Down’s

Struggling with stress can lead to the use of various items to calm down the nerves. Put-me down’s are typically medications that force the body to sleep or slow down temporarily. Examples are Valium, Librium or other barbiturates.
Problems can be a prime source of stress on the job. If you can resolve customer issues successfully, you will reduce stress.

Solving problems is a key element in providing great service. Customers don’t expect you to be perfect, but they do expect you to “fix” things.

If nothing else, you can be a partner to finding solutions.
These are some of the basic steps that can be taken to “problem-solving.”

- Listen to the problem.  
  Active and selective listening

- Probe for understanding and clarity.

- Gather any information you need.

- Analyze possible solutions. Solicit other’s ideas.

- Decide on tactic to solve problem.

- Follow up!  
  - Is the problem solved?
## Can the Physical Setting Impact the Quality of Service?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Setting</th>
<th>How could that impact the quality of service you provide?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the lighting in the areas that your customers see pleasant or harsh? Is there natural lighting or florescent lighting? If florescent, is it the right hue for comfortable working conditions?</td>
<td>Employees would be more comfortable with fewer headaches or eyestrain. Customers would feel more welcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a waiting line in the area where students come in for assistance? Do they take numbers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you serve a population of student parents? If so, are there any accommodations for small children?

Are there magazines or student counseling materials available for students to read while waiting?

Are the chairs comfortable or do you have the hand-me-down ones?

How could that impact the quality of service you provide?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Setting</th>
<th>How could that impact the quality of service you provide?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are your brochures and other external publications laid out?  Is there a media carousel for them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything in the area that is purposefully designed for the comfort of the students while they wait?  If so, what?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the colors on the wall and the office décor tasteful or barren?  Do they provide for an environment that promotes open communication?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Setting</td>
<td>How could that impact the quality of service you provide?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the environment send a message that the school cares about the students, or does it say that it’s all business?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your front counter/reception area provide enough privacy for the discussion and transferring of confidential documents such as tax returns?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there enough room to handle the number of customers you have?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Managing your stress level is an important part of being able to provide excellent service to all of your customers.

What creates stress in your work environment?

What are some ways you have found to reduce that stress?

Do Things GIVE You Stress?
Some other tips to help reduce the impact of stress:

Don’t take the causes of stress personally. Learn to deal with them professionally.

Watch what you say. Change from stress talk to smart talk.

Manage your time effectively. Practice long-term planning and use a time management system that works for you.

If possible, improve your work environment.

Manage stress – eat right, exercise regularly and practice relaxation techniques.
Ten Steps To Reduce the Stress Load

According to Steven L. Burns, M.D. in his book, How to Survive Unbearable Stress, there are 10 steps that can assist in reducing the stress load.

**Make your life regular** – Set the “clock” to a definite wake up and sleep time. Sleep problems won’t go away until the body’s clock is working again.

**Give yourself a break today** – Give the body time to repair itself. Take the list of things you want to do today and then cut off the bottom half.

**Lighten up your load of social engagements** – Say no a lot more often when it comes to request by others for your time.
Postpone making any changes in your living environment – Remember, change is stress. Postponing changes in your environment will help your stress reduction goal.

Reduce the number of hours you spend at work or school – Workaholic or schoolaholics need to reduce the energy drain on them. Take some time off and relax.

Is social media causing stress? Take a break from the phone.
The overstress diet – Overstress may result in the use of pick-me-ups, affecting your body’s blood sugar. Maintain a balanced diet and avoid blood sugar swings.

Reduce your use of pick-me-ups – Keep them away and avoid the invitation to binge.

Avoid allergies – Allergies are a major source of stress.

Start to enjoy exercise; rest your mind – Three times a week for 20 minutes to two hours can boost your happy messengers. *It also rests the Problem Solving part of the brain.*

Stop your put-me-downs – Tranquilizers and calmatives can prevent the body from restoring its happy messengers.
Saying “No”!

- Have you had to tell a student “no”?

- Do you have a technique to soften the message?
Saying “No”!

- Explain the problem
- Let the student know what you can do. Offer the alternatives first.
- Show empathy and concern
Five Maxims

1. All people want to be treated with **dignity** and **respect**.
2. All people want to be **asked** rather than being **told** to do something.
3. All people want to be **know why** they are being asked to do something.
4. All people want to be to be given **options** rather than **threats**.
5. All people want a **second chance**.
BODY LANGUAGE
AND TONE OF VOICE
CAN BE 93% OF THE
MESSAGE!
SHOWTIME!

1. “Stack Your Blocks”

2. Take a Breath

3. Put on your “Showtime Face”

4. Think or say “It’s Showtime!”

5. Think “I can do this!. They Love me!”

6. Step on Stage

7. Make sure your role and your voice are in alignment.
SERENITY NOW!

STRESS MANTRA
THANK YOU!!
WE’RE OUTTA HERE

Professional Connect LLC
Professional Development Training

Custom FunShops
Profconn.mark@gmail.com
480.652.6015
Mark Gotsch