



Holiday Stress: 11 Ways Managers Can Help Employees and the Business

By Rich Bayer, Ph.D.

The holiday season has begun. We can see signs of it everywhere we turn. Joy, goodwill and celebration are in the air.

But, the extra joy, goodwill, holiday parties, and gift giving take a lot of energy and planning. If you manage a business or supervise staff, you can predict that your employees will have more on their minds than usual. How can you be supportive of their needs, while still keeping focus on the company's work?

Here are 11 ways you can help them and your business during this time of year:

- 1) Be accommodating and flexible in terms of employee work hours.
- 2) Simplify what you do as a company. Have fewer holiday parties that are work-related. Keep it simple when it comes to decorating and holiday gift giving.
- 3) Increase your awareness, acknowledgement, and recognition of staff. You can do this by offering praise to individual staff members for what they do. You can tell them directly or use some little gimmicks such as stickers with words of appreciation or thanks.
- 4) Maintain effective lines of communication with staff, even more than usual. Keep everyone informed of what's going on. Let everyone know who'll be off, and when. This is important because work schedules change more during the holiday season with more requests for time off. Post dates and times of special events. Also, as supervisor, when you take time off, make sure someone else handles this communication function.
- 5) If work demands increase, consider increasing your staffing temporarily or scaling back somewhat. With more people taking time off, you don't want pressure to build among those who remain on the job.
- 6) Be on the lookout for warning signs of stress in staff. First, simply listen and observe. If someone is talking about being stressed, that's a clear sign. Also look for increased absenteeism or lateness, irritability or withdrawal or decreased patience or tolerance. In addition look for any kind of change in someone's performance or any overt sadness or anxiety.
- 7) When individuals show these signs, talk to them about it, in an empathic way. Help them think about alternative ways to manage their work duties and their holiday home demands. Remember, holiday stress is time-limited! Most supervisors can tolerate a little bit of personal business being done on the job, but during the holiday season the personal demands can grow. A polite reminder to employees that they can't spend all day planning their weekend holiday party can help the business and help the employee to recognize the boundaries between work and home. If more than a few employees seem stressed,

consider bringing in a stress management educator for a lunchtime presentation on managing holiday stress.

- 8) Be sensitive to cultural differences during the holidays. For your employees, this could be Christmas or Chanukah or Kwanzaa, or no holiday at all. Different cultures celebrate holidays differently.
- 9) And be sensitive to people's experience. In America, we have this image of the holidays as a time for the perfect family event. But rarely does the event live up to our expectations. This in itself can distress us and affect how we work.
- 10) On a similar note, the holidays are perceived to be celebrations of joy. But they can also bring sadness. For instance, the first holiday after the death of a loved one can be particularly sad. Most likely, this is a "situational sadness," and the employee should rebound when the holiday is over.
- 11) As a boss, if you notice someone struggling with the day-to-day job requirements or someone who appears down while everyone else is celebrating at the company party, you can talk with that person and acknowledge what you see. Ask him or her what's going on and be a good listener.

By putting these ideas into practice, you can help your employees through the holiday season. Hopefully you can convert some of that holiday stress into holiday cheer.

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