

STRESSING OUT?

Everyone experiences work-related stress in some form; it's how you cope with it that counts.

BY KNEEZ BUKHARI – *Not stressed, just terribly, terribly alert!*

Your alarm malfunctioned this morning; you overslept by two hours. Your dog ate all your clean shirts and you smeared marmite all over that report that absolutely had to be in on time today. Then your train broke down on the way to work. Feeling completely frazzled before you even start the day? Welcome to the world of stress. It only gets worse, but you probably already know that.

These days, stress isn't just another excuse; work-related stress costs society billions of pounds a year. The Health and Safety Executive estimates that 13.4 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2001. However, even though stress is a recognized medical condition, for many people it still represents something of an unknown quantity.

People deal with stress in different ways, some noticeably better than others.

Most people have their own ways to unwind, some simple, some strange and some patently absurd, but as long as they work for you, who cares?

So the next time you feel the all too familiar build up of pressure signalling the potential onset of homicidal tendencies, try one of these:

WALK IT OFF

A quick walk round the office or a jog at lunchtime can do wonders to clear your head, and has the added benefit of improving your fitness levels. All those endorphins rushing round your body will soon beat the stress demons back into submission. Note, this does not include walking out on a window ledge or in front of any moving vehicles.

PUNCH IT OUT

Join a gym, take a kickboxing class after work or simply buy a big blow-up

hammer and hit inanimate objects with it when you get home. Trust me, this really works! And it's fun too!

GO SURFING

Yes, it's against company policy and your manager will frown on it, but a break from sales figures and pie charts to flick through your mail or marvel at those Viking helmeted kittens singing Gay Bar, may be just the ticket if it saves a colleague from a pencil in the eye. (NB: www.rathergood.com)

LAUGH IT OFF

Focus on something that brings a smile to your face, whether it's a photograph of you snogging a statue in Ibiza, or a stuffed hamster dressed up like Elvis. Sometimes a moment's comic relief is all that's needed to put things into perspective.

BREAK OUT

Go for a wander, grab a drink from the vending machine, drop by someone's desk for a chat or pop outside for a breath of fresh air. Anything that breaks up the monotony of your routine and gives your mind time to assess your thoughts, will only improve your performance at work.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Try yoga, recite a mantra or memorise a poem to calm yourself down when things start to get on top of you. Try not to recite anything out loud while in the middle of a board meeting or in a packed elevator.

If all else fails, buy a stress ball... and throw it at someone. ■

