

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SAFETY ENGINEERS NORTH FLORIDA CHAPTER

OCTOBER 2015 NEWSLETTER

Occupational Stress and Country Music

I had a conversation with my doctor a few weeks ago about a condition that I'm being treated for. While he was attempting to determine how I got this condition, he barraged me with a series of questions. Do I drink heavily? No. Do I smoke? Never. Is there a family history of this condition? No. Do I exercise regularly? Yes. Am I frequently stressed out? Wait. What? Of course I am. Isn't everyone? But in reality, my current level of job stress is nowhere near where it was a decade ago. Unfortunately, as it turns out, the effects of stress are often cumulative and don't just reverse themselves. The high-level of stress that you may have experienced a decade ago may still negatively affect your health today.

According to NIOSH, The nature of our work is changing at hurricane-like speed. Now, perhaps more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers and, in turn, to the health of organizations and society.

It goes without saying that many people in today's society are more-stressed than previous generations, or

at least they perceive themselves to be.

Comparing myself to my grandfathers, I cannot really say that I am presently more stressed than they were. I have more sources of stress; but overall, they had a more-difficult, more-stressful life. My maternal grandfather was a coal miner working to support ten children. My paternal grandfather fought in WWII. I work in an office. My biggest stressors are deadlines, attempting to modify employee behavior, and traffic. So, can I really compare my sources and levels of stress to theirs? After all, I don't travel a mile underground to work; nor do I have large diameter mortar rounds whizzing by me.

According to the American Psychological Association, there are at least six myths about stress. The first is that stress is the same for everyone. It isn't. We all handle it differently and what may stress me out may not do so to you. The second myth is that stress is always bad for you. Reportedly, it isn't. Comparing the human condition to a violin string, it is thought that too much tension makes the music shrill and causes snapping; too little and the music is raspy and dull. The issue becomes how to manage the stress. The third myth relates to stress being

everywhere and therefore nothing can be done about it. According to the American Psychological Association, not so; we have the ability as humans to plan our lives so that stress does not overwhelm us. Myth four states that the most popular techniques for stress reduction are the best ones. Again, not so. Since we are all different, and therefore so are the effects of stress, only a tailored, comprehensive program will produce desirable results. Myth five postulates that lack of symptoms equates to no stress. Once more, not true. In today's climate where medication is often handed out like lollipops, the signs of stress are significantly masked and a person may be deprived of the signals and symptoms that would initiate action on the individual's part to reduce it. Therefore, it is asserted, the effects of stress on your psyche and body are still there; they're just not being addressed. Myth six suggests that only major symptoms of stress require attention. This myth assumes that minor physical symptoms such as excess stomach acid and headaches may be safely ignored. Once more, not true. Minor symptoms are early warnings that steps need to be taken to promptly manage stress

and preclude major symptoms and problems.

With six popular myths busted, here are some things that we do know to be true. Workplace stress can indeed be detrimental to you. According to a CNN article, it can be as harmful in some situations as secondhand smoke. The CNN article asserts that high job demands can increase the odds of having a doctor-diagnosed illness by 35%; working long hours can increase the chances of early death by 20%. The stress associated with fear of job loss can increase the odds of poor health by 50%.

Science News recently published an article about stress. In it, the Whitehall Study, in which British researchers demonstrated that stressed workers were suffering ill effects, was highlighted. The study showed that British civil servants in the lowest-tier jobs were three times as likely to die of heart problems than men in more-lucrative positions. When the researchers removed extra

variables by comparing the low-tier men with those in higher-level jobs who were similar in weight, smoking status and other factors, the lower-achieving men still died sooner and had more heart attacks. They concluded that stress was the key factor that led to lower levels of good health in this group.

In conclusion, "Take This Job and Shove It" was a No. 1 country hit in 1977. Looking back, perhaps songwriter David Allan Coe's advice was sound. But in the real world, who can actually take it? However, there are those individuals who can in no way afford to ignore it. In their case, they must recognize and acknowledge their sources of stress, then make a plan to eliminate them.

Bob Dooley

Article Sources and Hyperlinks of Interest

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-101/pdfs/99-101.pdf>

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-myths.aspx>

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/03/health/stress-work-secondhand-smoke/index.html>

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/chronic-stress-can-wreak-havoc-body>



Illustration Credit - Science News

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/chronic-stress-can-wreak-havoc-body>

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Member Accomplishments

The ASSE local chapter would like to recognize and congratulate Anne Rogers for recently passing the Board of Certified Safety Professionals CSP exam. We are so very proud of her and her accomplishment.

Next ASSE Local Chapter Meeting

Our next membership meeting will be held at the Northeast Florida Safety Council on October 21st at 11:30 a.m. Please RSVP to Steve Wilson at steven_wilson1@me.com.