

STRESS SOLUTION TOOL

Personal Narrative Case Study 1

Data indicate that 22% of group health insurance costs are stress related and in the neighborhood of \$308 billion dollars annually.¹

Stress is the most costly lifestyle factor in corporate America and was found to generate more than \$35 million in medical costs at Union Pacific Railroad based in Omaha, Nebraska.²

The U.S Bureau of Labor says that stress costs US businesses \$300 billion annually in lost productivity, absenteeism, accidents, employee turnover, and medical, legal and insurance fees, and workers' compensation awards.³

Anne's Heart Attack

Anne was surprised when her cardiologist suggested stress management to treat "heart attack" symptoms. Marketing director for an aggressive high-tech firm at 36, she was in line for promotion to vice president. She drove a new sports car, traveled extensively, and had an active social life. Sure, she felt stressed occasionally, but she was in control of her life and doing quite nicely, thank you.

That was on the outside; on the inside, she felt "the wheels on my tricycle are about to fall off. I'm a mess." For several months, she had had attacks of shortness of breath, heart palpitations, chest pains, dizziness, and tingling sensations in her fingers and toes. Filled with a sense of impending doom, she would become anxious to the point of panic. Every day she dreaded the panic attacks that could strike without reason or warning.

The symptoms were so bad that on two occasions she rushed to a nearby hospital emergency room, fearing she was having a heart attack. The first episode followed an argument with her boyfriend about the future of their relationship, and the second followed a fight at work with her boss over a new marketing campaign. Tests showed nothing wrong with her heart. She left the hospital with instructions on how to breathe into a paper bag to reduce hyperventilation, and a prescription for tranquilizers. She felt foolish, and went home embarrassed, angry and confused. She remained convinced that she had almost had a heart attack.

She sought the advice of a cardiologist, who conducted a battery of tests with no physical findings. He saw how stressed out she was, though, and suggested she take the STRESS SOLUTIONS TOOL (SST) offered through her work place.

¹ Manning, M., et.al., "Occupational stress, social support, and the costs of health care." Academy of Management Journal, 1996, Vol. 39, No. 3, 738-750.

² Leutzinger, Goetzel, Richling, & Wades, 1993.

³ The U.S. Bureau of Labor, Government Report, 1996.

Anne took the SST and shared the results with her counselor. By taking the SST, she learned that many of her physical symptoms were stress-related. The sources and nature of her health problems related to stress were finally clearly outlined for her in her SST Employee Interpretive Report. This confidential report that was instantly generated after taking the SST showed her physical symptoms were being brought on by high levels of family stress compounded with additional stress from other areas of her personal life and job. She became aware of how susceptible to stress she was making herself by not sleeping or eating well, not exercising, abusing caffeine and alcohol, and living on the edge financially.

The SST Employee Interpretive Report generated by her online assessment crystallized for Anne how susceptible she was to stress, what was causing her stress, and how stress was expressing itself in her "heart attack" and other symptoms. As she learned about her stress, Anne was increasingly able to separate her concerns into simpler, more manageable problems, and reduce the risk of further panic "heart" attacks.

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What does it cost a company in time, money and lost knowledge to have an important executive in a company lose their ability to handle success? Employees at Anne's level can cost 2 to 2.5 times their salary and benefits to replace and can take 6 months on average away from the equivalent of their productivity⁴. And, employees who go out on disability as Anne might have can be even more costly.

The investment Anne's company made in the SST was rewarded by keeping a valued employee out of the doctors' offices and at the company office working at a higher level through being able to handle her promotion which benefited company and herself. In this case, the SST and Anne's EAP counselor were a winning combination in bringing about positive outcomes.

⁴ Bliss & Associates Inc. (2001) Cost of Turnover. www.blissandassociates.com/html/articles/cost_of_turnover15.html; Phillips JD (1990) The Price Tag on Turnover. *Personnel Journal*, 69(12): 58, December 1999.