Question 1: Are all stressful events equally stressful?

Answer 1:

Actually, not all stressful events are the same. Research indicates that certain types of stressors are worse than others. The most deleterious stressors are those that are negative, uncontrollable, unpredictable, and ambiguous. In the workplace, certain stressors have been found to be especially harmful. The most stressful workplace stressors are those that involve physical hazards, overload and pressure, ambiguity and role conflict, unsatisfying relationships with superiors, lack of control, and threat of unemployment.

Question 2: What is burnout?

Answer 2:

_Burnout_ is a state of emotional or physical exhaustion as a result of extreme and continual stress (Girdino, Everly, & Dusek, 1996). There are three stages of burnout: (a) stress arousal, possibly resulting in irritability, anxiety, high blood pressure, bruxism, insomnia, forgetfulness, and bodily complaints; (b) energy conservation, which involves attempting to accommodate the stress through excessive tardiness, procrastination, excessive time off, decreased sexual drive, fatigue, social withdrawal, substance use or abuse, and apathy; and (c) exhaustion—a type of giving up which can include chronic sadness or depression, chronic somatic problems, the desire to "drop out," and suicide ideation.

Question 3: What are the characteristics of a person in burnout?

Answer 3: Aside from the symptoms described above in the various stages, a person in burnout typically experiences emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced self-esteem or sense of accomplishment. In many ways, burnout creates a vicious self-perpetuating cycle. It is important to recognize that burnout is not a sign of a personal weakness or failure. In many instances, it is just a natural by-product of working in an emotionally demanding profession.
Question 4: What are the common professional responses to burnout?

Answer 4:

Girdino, Everly, and Dusek (1996) have identified six common professional responses to burnout on the job:

- Broken spirit
- Leave the profession
- Trapped in a gilded cage
- Dead wood
- Quitting upward
- Trigger for growth

Broken spirit refers to when a worker gives up and feels depressed or disillusioned. In the second response, some workers decide that their field isn’t for them and leave the profession entirely. Some workers feel "trapped" by their profession because it may pay better than other fields or because they have studied so long to work in their field, and feel they cannot leave. Others become "dead wood" by remaining on the job but doing the minimal amount of work necessary just to get by. Some workers are able to get promoted to a higher level position for which they may or may not be truly qualified, creating a whole host of other problems. The ideal response is for burnout to become a trigger for growth—personal, professional, spiritual, or metaphysical.

Question 5: How can a person manage stress and avoid burnout?

Answer 5: There are several steps that employees can take to manage stress and avoid burnout. Be aware of stressors in the workplace and their frequency. Monitor the occurrence of this stress and take note of its emotional, physical, and behavioral effects. Often, stress can be detected through observation. A stress diary can be especially useful to help keep track of self-observations. Identify skill deficits that are making the problems worse, and take steps to acquire needed skills, such as time management, emotional or behavioral regulation, diet, or exercise. Find methods to relax, like meditation, gardening, cooking, or music.
Question 6: What is coping style?

Answer 6:

*Coping* refers to one's general tendency to deal with stress in a specific manner. It is a function of a person's individual personality style when under stress, and it develops over time as one learns to adapt to life's many challenges. Sometimes a person's coping style makes things worse, unfortunately. There are three general coping styles: (a) avoidance versus confrontation (Suls & Fletcher, 1985), (b) disclosure (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986), and (c) problem- versus emotion-focused (Folkman, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1979). Avoidance refers to finding ways to distract oneself and not face the issue at hand. This coping method may be useful at times (such as when one has no control over the stressor), and other times it is counterproductive (such as binge alcohol drinking). Confrontation includes facing problems head-on, but it also involves hypervigilance, which tends to be maladaptive. Disclosure is the tendency to seek social support from others. Problem- versus emotion-focused coping distinguishes between coping that aims to reduce emotions and coping that aims to resolve the problems.

Question 7: Aside from these general coping styles, are there any specific strategies that are used when coping?

Answer 7:

Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, Delongis, & Gruen (1986) have identified eight different ways that people tend to cope with specific stressors:

- Confrontation
- Seek social support
- Planful problem solving
- Self-control
- Distancing
- Positive reappraisal
- Accept responsibility
- Escape and avoidance

Confrontation, seeking social support, and planful problem-solving are all simple terms. Self-control involves taking steps to regulate or control one's emotional state or feelings. Distancing is an active form of emotionally detaching oneself from the stressful situation,
such as not thinking about the problem. Positive reappraisal, also known as reframing, entails seeking a positive viewpoint of the problem to make it feel less threatening or harmful. Accepting responsibility has to do with acknowledging one's role in the problem as a step toward solving it. Finally, escape and avoidance reflects a form of wishful thinking to avoid the problem by drinking, using drugs, smoking, etc.

**Question 8: What other resources might help a person cope?**

**Answer 8:**

Other helpful resources include any special abilities, talents, gifts, or other positive personal attributes that might help a person cope with stress. Factors such as intelligence (which aids in problem solving), an outgoing personality (which wins friends and thereby increases self-esteem and social support), physical attractiveness, and the number of close friends or family members are considered alternate coping strategies.

**References**


