

# Common Workplace Reactions During High Stress

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Many workplaces are feeling the wear and tear of reacting to sudden changes, losing employees, expanding the scope of work and living in a survival mode. As a result of staying in a mode of high stress and high pressure, there are common experiences that occur for work teams. Three systemic problems that may occur are:

1. Management focusing on productivity and external demands rather than employee performance or interpersonal dynamics. When this cycle occurs, it may help in the short-run to get through a crisis, but it is a pattern that doesn't sustain itself and lends itself to a perception of neglect by employees.
2. Leadership losing sight of a vision or clear goals. As a result of this, employees may perceive a lack of direction and there can be a disintegration of trust in management and an increase in conflict and turf battles.
3. Employees or a team see their welfare depending on an advantage over someone else, and it is based on a belief that there is a scarcity of opportunity or rewards. Whenever one side gets ahead, the other is threatened, leading to more aggressive behavior. This leads to defensive behaviors on both parts and there is a focus on "getting my piece of the pie" and you can fend for yourself.

The reality is that these are normal responses to systems that have not been able to attend to the maintenance of their organization. Work teams are a lot like cars when it comes to keeping them running. We can push a car by skipping an oil change and it may still be fine, but if we continue to ignore essential services we will pay a price with how the car is functioning.

Many teams and organizations have stayed in the crisis mode and let go of the functions that keep them healthy. Staff meetings get skipped, poor performance gets accommodated rather than addressed, high achievers get asked to do more and feel less valued and the focus is to just get through the next day.

At this time, there is a need for many leadership teams to pause, take a collective breath and identify what it is that has been on the back-burner when it comes to the essential health of a workgroup. Meeting with staff, pausing to reflect on accomplishments in spite of adversity, re-focusing the goals for the next 3 months, giving employees feedback (both positive and negative) can go a long way toward re-engaging a work team.

It's sometimes hard to make these steps a priority but it is as necessary as remembering to put gas in the car if we want to get somewhere. If you have a leadership role and would like to talk further about what may be helpful with your team, please give the staff at Sand Creek a call at 1.800.550.MCIT.

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