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Self-Help

Surviving Job Stress: How to Overcome Workday Pressures
John B. Arden
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Many people don't realize that stress can cause unpredictable results. Besides the obvious physical symptoms, stress can result in other actions that can be just as detrimental. Not recognizing the symptoms early can cause a person to overreact in a way that may further amplify the stress.

The author helps readers recognize symptoms of workplace stress and offers options for dealing with it. As the Director of Training for Psychology and Social Work at Kaiser Permanente Medical Centers in California, he oversees many training programs and leads the job stress treatment program. Throughout the book he uses applicable work-related anecdotes and examples from various occupations to illustrate potential situations and courses of action.

The book excels in several areas. Arden takes a holistic approach to dealing with work-related stress, focusing on the manifestation of stress in terms of physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms. It also makes the distinction between stress that comes from within a person-such as unrealistic expectations-and stress induced by coworkers or other external factors. One example tells of Sara, a programmer who takes it upon herself to complete a project within a strict deadline without the help of her coworkers. Her stress results in insomnia, succumbing to a cold, and becoming forgetful and irritable, and it eventually affects her job performance when she strikes out defensively and starts snapping at her coworkers and missing work deadlines.

Arden intends to get the reader to identify the root of the problem, and then offers suggestions for resolution at a physical and emotional level. He devotes a chapter to medicine and herbs that can be used to treat the symptoms of stress, and also discusses the importance of exercise, getting the proper amount of sleep, and various relaxation techniques.

The book also excels in heightening the awareness that additional unforeseen negative repercussions of stress can occur. Rather than focusing on only the direct cause of stress, Arden

also illustrates how stress-induced behavior can cause additional problems. He cites many cases illustrating that the key is to recognize stress and take action before it escalates into a more serious situation. Michael, a forklift driver who gets chastised by his boss, goes home and yells at his wife, ignores his kids, and kicks the dog, causing yet another stressful situation at home. Bud copes with stress by going out and having a few beers, but what he doesn't realize is that his "antidote" is resulting in insomnia, depression, and an unhealthy addiction that will cause him more problems in the long run.

Arden hammers home the point that the best way a person can deal with work-related stress is to change the way he or she deals with it. He discusses various ways of coping, including "transcending techno fear," telecommuting, exercising, medicinal and herbal remedies, meditation, and other relaxation techniques. He suggests dealing with anger productively by "channeling that anger into constructive behaviors" that may result in a resolution of the problem. He also mentions dealing with a bully by practicing "interpersonal judo," allowing the harasser's assault to backfire without standing in the way. A target of verbal abuse can lead the harasser to voice comments where they are overheard by other people, which can cause embarrassment to the harasser and deter similar behavior in the future, or provide witnesses if a grievance is later filed.

Arden's chapter on taking time off provides a thought-provoking perspective on the pros and cons of taking a break from work to get away from a stressful situation. He cautions readers: "How you use your time off is critically important. Some people use the time productively and recover from the accumulated stress. Others use the time unproductively and fall into a black hole, becoming more depressed and anxious."

The book is written in a conversational style and is well organized and easy to read. All nineteen chapters contain illustrative anecdotes, and the charts sprinkled throughout the book contain useful information in a format that's easy to digest. Readers tempted to target only specific chapters could very easily find themselves getting drawn in by the book and ending up reading it from cover to cover.