

Workplace Stress: Help...I'm in the weeds!



Waiting tables was one of the most stressful jobs I've ever had! The primary stressors were balancing the unrealistic and constant demands of the guests in an environment of intense time pressure. One mistake and you were 'in-the-weeds'.

Are you "in-the-weeds"? Use this eTool to help you identify some possible stressors at work. Then, with renewed hope and enthusiasm, take some constructive action! You can regain your perspective and focus with some deliberate action, the help of your colleagues and of course, the Lord himself!

Chronic Workplace Stressors: ¹

	Issue	Action
Role Overload	When the sum total of all the expectations that others have of us far exceed what we are able to do. <i>e.g. "1- hour's worth of potatoes to peel and only 20-min until dinner, and, oh, can you do a salad as well?"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify the real priorities Simplify your life Manage (limit) the expectations of others. Say "no"
Role Conflict	When others have conflicting or inconsistent expectations of us. <i>e.g. you should be in kitchen helping with the food; you should be with the guests playing host.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address head on the conflicting expectations Look for ways to compromise, integrate or change the conflicting expectations.
Role Ambiguity	When you don't really know what the expectations of you are and therefore, you can only guess what you are supposed to be doing. <i>e.g. "Go into the kitchen and be helpful, make a side dish or a dessert or something."</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek clarity. Be direct with others, in particular your boss, about your lack of clarity. If your boss can't clarify your role, define it yourself and ask for approval. Write it down.
Role Underload and Monotony	When you are perpetually underutilized or engaged in monotonous, often seemingly meaningless work. <i>e.g. "why don't you stand by the fridge and open it when people ask you to."</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be direct about your dissatisfaction. Ask for more responsibility, greater task variety or more significance work. Prove your worth in the small so that you can be entrusted with more.

Symptoms of Strain:

When the stressors in your life pile up, you will experience strain that shows up in a host of symptoms:

- Job dissatisfaction
- Burnout / Depression
- Absenteeism / Turnover
- Performance issues
- Poor decision making
- Lack of concentration
- Forgetfulness
- Immune system (colds, flu, sinus)



POINTS OF ACTION:

Step 1: Identify your stressor(s) and the symptoms of strain you see.

Step 2: Be honest with yourself about your priorities and limitations.

Step 3: Be crystal clear about deadlines and project expectations.

Step 4: Seek clear and realistic expectations for yourself.

Step 5: Break activities down into manageable chunks, focus on one at a time.

Mark 1:35-39

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else-to the nearby villages-so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons."

Here we see Jesus dealing with unrealistic and conflicting, though perhaps not ambiguous, expectations. He prayerfully clarifies his priorities and manages his disciples' expectations. Then he chooses a course of action that was the best use of his time. *What an example to follow!*

¹ Adapted from: Organizational Behavior, Robert Kreitner, Angelo Kinicki, McGraw Hill, Boston, MA, 2004. p. 419 & p. 693