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MIND & BODY

BALANCING BOTH FOR
EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING



Creating a Healthy Work Environment

BY KELLY
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*Helping Employees Manage
Stress and Avoid Injury*

Targeted treatments aren't just for your guests. Massage Heights invites their therapists to indulge in regular massage to relieve tension and avoid injury.

No one works well under adverse conditions.

It's important to create an environment wherein employees are provided the tools to help them manage stress as well as avoid work-related injuries.

"With rising medical costs, not only for individuals but also for companies, employers should take a preventative approach toward creating a healthy workplace," says Shane Evans, president and founder of Massage Heights Corporate LLC, a day spa franchise company with headquarters based in San Antonio, Texas.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), productivity losses due to absenteeism cost employers US\$225.8 billion annually in the United States (or US\$1,685 per employee). Based on the Labour Force Survey in the United Kingdom, stress accounted for 37 percent of all work-related ill health cases and 45 percent of all working days lost due to poor health in 2015 and 2016. The study further indicated that employees in public service industries (such as health-care workers) show higher levels of stress compared to all other occupations.

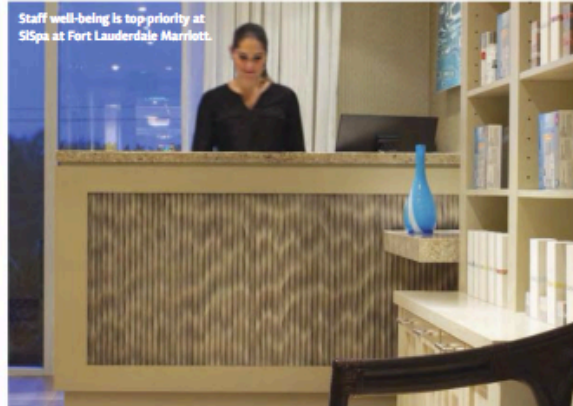
The findings highlight a great need for providing a safe workplace in a spa

environment, where employees are expected to genuinely care for guests. "The spa specifically is a place of healing, relaxation and rejuvenation, so we put processes in place to ensure the well-being and health of not only our guests, but our employees too," says Jacquie Thompson, spa manager at SiSpa at Fort Lauderdale Marriott Pompano Beach Resort & Spa in Pompano Beach, Florida.

STRESSED OUT

While it's unlikely to completely remove stress factors at work, it can be reduced by providing employees the resources and support they need, especially during stressful times. "The biggest symptom is disengagement in the workplace. This shows up in absenteeism, lack of focus, and agitation with co-workers and supervisors," says Jean Kolb, owner of Jean Kolb Well By Choice, LLC. "You can't function at your highest performance when you are mentally or emotionally stressed. Business owners have to recognize the symptoms early so they can be addressed prior to an employee becoming disengaged."

According to TouchAmerica Inc. CEO Stewart Griffith, a few of the symptoms of a stressed-out employee include reduced productivity, high irritability, increased

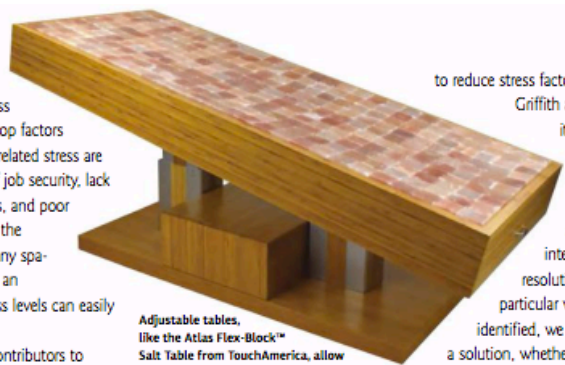


Staff well-being is top priority at SiSpa at Fort Lauderdale Marriott.

illness, increased absences, and even a loss of humor. Some of the top factors that contribute to work-related stress are long work hours, lack of job security, lack of training and resources, and poor work relationships. Add the physical demands of many spa-related jobs and you get an environment where stress levels can easily escalate.

"One of the major contributors to employee work-related stress is the physically demanding nature of certain treatments, such as massage and body work," says Thompson. "Also, many therapists by nature are sensitive to the energies of people and will pick up on the stress and tension of their guests, which takes an additional toll on the therapist."

Employees can also feel stressed when they feel like they aren't able to get their work accomplished, whether from lack of help, training, or support from management. "We are a society of functioning within our business with a 'lean and mean' mentality. That is, we have to do more with less in order to remain competitive. As business owners, we need a good handle on what the responsibilities are of each position and



Adjustable tables, like the Atlas Flex-Block™ Salt Table from TouchAmerica, allow therapists to work more comfortably and avoid injury.

how best to prioritize what functions will make the biggest impact to the business," Kolb says.

REDUCING THE STRESSORS

As a manager, you can't control what is going on at home or in your employees' personal lives, but you can help make their work life less stressful.

"As a leader, it is my job to both listen directly to my employees, as well as to stay abreast of potential problems before they present themselves," says Griffith. "Giving people the training and support they need, plus providing the materials, equipment and technology required for them to do their job efficiently [are ways

to reduce stress factors]."

Griffith also pointed out that it's important to give people a chance to express their grievance in a safe setting with the intention of finding a resolution. "Once the particular workplace stressor is identified, we work together toward a solution, whether it is additional resources or training or a change in the job description," he says.

To help identify common work stressors, Evans suggests keeping a journal for a week and creating a plan once factors are identified. "This may include blocking time on one's calendar to either recharge or focus on the work one needs to complete, rather than allowing others to create additional meetings for you to attend. Have an open dialogue with your supervisor, peers and/or direct reports establishing boundaries that would allow you to complete your tasks in a timely fashion or seek help from those who support you," she says.

Sometimes, all your employees need to de-stress is a little break. A 2011 study by the University of Illinois at Urbana-

Common Spa Injuries and How to Prevent Them

INJURY

Tenosynovitis: A condition caused by overuse—in this case, excessive use of the tendons of the thumb.

TIP

"Massage therapists should adequately condition their bodies for the physical demands of massage therapy. Stretching of the affected tendons after each massage session on a regular basis will be helpful. Additionally, practitioners can self-massage the affected tendons to help reduce any adhesions that might develop between the tendon and its sheath, effectively decreasing the incidence of this condition," says Evans.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: A condition where the median nerve becomes compressed, causing sensory and/or motor dysfunction.

"One alternative is to slightly supinate the forearm so that the therapist massages the client more on the ulnar side of the hand instead of the center of the anterior wrist or palm. Forearms are another good alternative contact. Stretching, self-massage and conditioning is important too. Finding all means possible to help decrease compressive loads on the median nerve is crucial. Massage therapists should get regular bodywork to their upper extremities, including the anterior forearm and hand," says Evans.

Champagne shows that brief diversions from a task can dramatically improve one's ability to focus on that task for prolonged periods.

"We often hear from our service providers that it is important for them to have an adequate rest between appointments to rejuvenate," says Thompson. "As such, we encourage our employees to take a few minutes to walk outside and breathe in the sea air. We also encourage therapists to offer each other reciprocal

AVOIDING INJURY

Creating an injury-free and healthy work environment means providing your staff the proper training so they can perform their job correctly without injury. Many spa jobs are physically demanding, and proper training will alleviate the risk for work-related injury. It's also important to provide staff the proper medical benefits and access to wellness programs that may help reduce their risks of injury.

"If you are seeing a stressed employee, offer to help them prioritize so everyone is working smarter, not harder."

— JEAN KOLB, Owner, Jean Kolb Well By Choice, LLC

spa services, which helps them to unwind and de-stress."

Kolb says spa owners and managers should take a proactive approach toward educating the workforce on the importance of self-care so they can function at a high level. "If you do see someone struggling (I call it the 'deer in the headlights syndrome'), give them a mental time out. Be flexible in allowing them personal time to take care of themselves so they can come back refreshed and ready to go," she says. "If you are seeing a stressed employee, offer to help them prioritize so everyone is working smarter, not harder. It is a good return on your investment of time if you do."

"We encourage our franchisees to offer benefits such as regular massages for all employees at a reduced cost and reimbursement for health and fitness clubs, health and fitness events, and chiropractic care," Evans says.

By providing the right tools, such as ergonomic equipment, work-related injuries can also be reduced. "In our Massage Heights retreats, we provide hydraulic tables that are adjustable to the therapist and to the client, which make it easier on a therapist while performing services. In addition, the flooring we use has extra cushion to help mitigate job-related aches and pains, as well as fatigue," she says.

She says it's also important that managers have an honest conversation with therapists to help identify their limitations, such as the number of hours of massage treatments they can do in a day. She also recommends providing therapists access to self-care products to use during their breaks.

In addition, Griffith says offering incentives to employees who choose to live a healthy lifestyle helps motivate them. "We have paid bonuses to employees who quit smoking. We are happy to currently have no employees who smoke," he says.

Unfortunately, even if you take all the preventative measures possible, accidents can happen. If a member of your staff is injured at work, be sure to take all the necessary legal steps your company requires. "First, make sure the staff member has proper medical attention and is supported in following medical advice," says Griffith. "Second, identify the cause of the injury. Third, take steps to prevent it in the future, which may require better training, repairing equipment, providing safety equipment or removing obstacles."

Whatever practices or tools you have in place, be sure to put safety and employee well-being top priority as it has a direct impact on employee morale, productivity and, ultimately, company profitability. ■

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