



By Patricia Katz

Ease the Pressure - Lighten the Load

Partner massive workloads with high-speed expectations and you've got a recipe for disaster. Remove any sense of control and toss a lack of appreciation on the pile, and the mix grows downright explosive.

If you find yourself leading a group through high-pressure times, here are 10 ways you can ease the pressure on yourself, your colleagues, and your employees.

1. Test the Truth

Start with yourself. Yes, you may love your work, the challenge, and the rewards. However, give your work style the two-point acid test. Have your physician and a fitness expert rate the state of your physical health. Ask those who matter in your personal life (close family and friends) how pleased they are about your availability and involvement in their lives. Listen with care and attention. Adjust accordingly.

2. Model the Way

Take care of yourself and be seen to be taking care of yourself. When you take a walk, a break, a breather, a vacation, you telegraph to others that it's okay for them to do the same. Work flat out 24/7, send e-mails at two in the morning, and it won't matter what you say to others. They'll follow your lead and feel guilty if they don't or can't. Your lived example sets the tone and the pace.

3. Link to Purpose

You and I can often do more than we ever thought possible when fired up by a compelling reason for tackling a job. Lift up your eyes and encourage those around you to do the same. Meetings, paperwork, phone calls ... they're all just busy-ness unless they're linked to a real and vital purpose. What are you really trying to accomplish? How are you serving your clients? Why does the work matter? Make this deeper, broader view part of your everyday conversation.

4. See the Whole Person

Take the time to keep in touch with those around you. Stay current with what is happening in their lives at work and beyond. How are their needs and interests changing? What other pressures are they facing that might affect their capacity now and in the future? Yes, I know you're busy. You'll be even busier if key people burn out or drop out and you didn't see it coming.

5. Monitor the Workload

Each time you delegate major tasks to others and add to the workload, ask these questions: How does this affect the other tasks we have on the go? Do you need help reordering priorities? Do we need to juggle responsibilities or call on outside resources to handle the fallout from the changes we're discussing? Help others draw the line between what's essential and what can wait.

6. Lighten the Load

Protect your group from outrageous expectations imposed from elsewhere. Negotiate on their behalf for reasonable time frames, helpful technology and appropriate resources. Identify processes that can be simplified. Stop providing some services and filling certain roles. Pinpoint tasks that could be done less often and/or less-than-perfectly with minimal risk.

7. Make It Safe to Say

If you want solid and reliable information on the status of projects and workloads, you need to ask the tough questions and be open to the truth. If you explode at news you didn't want to hear, you'll be served a watered down, censored version in the future. Being out of the loop will improve neither the quality of your decision-making nor the quality of your relationships.

8. Curb the Whining

Letting off steam helps – to a point. Blowing steam repeatedly in the presence of someone who is not involved and can do nothing to resolve a situation is simply sidestepping responsibility. Curb the excuses, justifications and blaming. Encourage the practice of speaking directly to someone who can do something about a problem. Ask, "What can we do to move this situation forward?"

9. Share the Appreciation

You couldn't get the job done without the hard work and dedication of your colleagues. When you look at their contributions, does the effort required match the reward provided? We're not just talking money. Notice what people are doing. Actively appreciate their contributions in person, in writing or in kind. Be specific, be current, be sincere. Words and actions of appreciation convey respect and honour the value of the individual. Co-workers matter. Do you let them know they matter?

10. Respect Time Off

Don't burden colleagues with information and problems that they can do nothing about just before they head off for the weekend or start their vacation. Resist the urge to place weekend and evening calls unless they are true emergencies. Guard against artificial urgency – needlessly working everyone into a frenzy of immediacy. Watch for it in yourself and challenge it in others.

Bonus Tip: Value Reflection as Much as Action

Speed and action are only half of the recipe for success. Honour the importance of calm reflection – thinking with care about situations and opportunities. In the long run, an immediate response is not always as valuable as a considered response. Carve out space and time to harvest the learning after important events and milestones. Schedule opportunities to pause, plan and ponder.

Life Balance Strategist Patricia Katz is a speaker, author and consultant who specializes in perspective and productivity. Her programs and publications on work-life balance, stress, time and organization help groups and individuals restore the rhythm of renewal to work and life. Access valuable learning resources at www.patkatz.com and www.pauseworks.com. To bring Patricia's expertise to your organization, contact her at info@patkatz.com or toll free at 877-728-5289.