



# MANAGING WORK STRESS

- All about a good energy balance
- Practical tips about managing (work-related) stress
- Practical examples from other SMEs



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## What is workrelated stress?

Work is healthy and work pressure is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, we need work pressure to perform and it can even lead to flow. However, when there is long-term work pressure without compensation in the form of rest or job resources (such as support or help) it results in work-related stress. Our performance, our well-being and even our health can suffer. It's all about the right balance.

### Stress at or caused by work

Stress at or caused by the work situation is called work-related stress. Work-related stress arises if the demands that the job places on a person are greater than their capacity to meet those demands. What a person wants or what is demanded of them is more than they are capable of, or believe they are capable of. For

example, too much work and too little time. A negative atmosphere at work or inappropriate behaviour such as bullying can also result in stress. If there are too few opportunities for recovery and 'recharging' or if there is no prospect of improvement, stress can lead to health problems and absence.

### The approach

The good news is that there is often something you can do about it. It starts with a good conversation: what exactly is the matter? Depending on the problem, the approach will focus on the work itself (the amount and/or content), on the available job resources or on your employee's resilience. In this way you can prevent serious consequences, such as long-term absence due to burn-out.

### The human being as a battery

The consultants at ArboNed use the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R model) to judge what is a good balance. The idea of the model is that the job imposes certain demands that cost energy (job demands/stressors) but that people also derive energy from their work (job resources). Job demands relate to the quantity of work an employee has to perform and the time available. But work pressure can also arise if the employee's tasks are unclear or if they don't have the right resources (such as knowledge or tools) to perform them.

Job resources help employees to get their work done. Advice that helps them get their work done more quickly, information that helps the employee know what they have to do, support if an employee is suffering from stress and to help them put things in perspective or opportunities to grow and develop skills; all of these things help employees to enjoy their work and stay energised. By looking

at work through the lens of the JD-R model, you can view a person as a battery that sometimes runs out (as a result of stressors that demand a lot of effort) and recharges itself (for example through job resources, the positive aspects of the job).

### Reducing work pressure

If you want to tackle work-related stress effectively, start by increasing the job resources. What is going well in the job, what makes things go smoothly and what helps a person get their work done? That is easier and more effective than reducing work pressure.

The three most important job resources are autonomy, competence and connection. Competence is about performing and achieving results. Achievable results are an important motivator. Autonomy gives an employee control in their work; when there is a risk of stress arising, the employee has the autonomy and opportunities for control to adapt their work, for example by rescheduling. Connection is about having social contacts at work and feeling that you are part of a team or your company. These job resources not only contribute to job satisfaction, scientific research also demonstrates that they result in improved job performance and reduced absence.

### Busy job = stress?

Employers sometimes find it hard to understand where the work-related stress reported by

### Examples of job demands or 'stressors':

- High workload
- Mental stress
- Physical stress
- Emotional stress

### Examples of energy sources:

- Support from colleagues and managers
- Ability to contribute to decision making
- Career options
- Autonomy
- Feedback



employees comes from. They may tell us "My employee doesn't have a high-pressure job". But the perception of work pressure is different for everyone. An employee may experience the demands placed on them very differently and make them much bigger in their imagination than they actually are – and so experience work pressure from meeting them.

How high does a person set the bar, how much do they enjoy their work? It is all about strengthening job resources.

When an employee is experiencing stress-related complaints, it is often because job resources are lacking. This explains why some people can work very hard and cope with a heavy emotional load: they have a lot of job resources at work. For example, a surgeon who operates under huge pressure for hours on end. They are able to use all their skills, receive recognition and appreciation for their work, have the support of a whole team and earn a good salary too.

# Managing stressed employees

When an employee takes sick leave due to (work-related) stress, this has an impact on your organisation. You and the rest of the team must fill the missing employee's place. We understand that this type of sick leave is complicated. This is how you manage the situation well.

## Entrepreneur vs employee

One person is less resilient than another. That involves many factors, one of which is work. Your idea of work-related stress may differ from that of your employees. Entrepreneurs generally accept that some stress is inevitable. When they encounter problems, they take a deep breath and soldier on.

You and your employee experience their illness differently. For your employee, being ill is the primary concern. Not for you. As an employer, you need to run a business and manage other employees.

**It is already part of the solution if you realise and respect that your perception may be very different from your employee's perception.**

## Prevent stress-related absenteeism

It is best to be honest about the theme of (work-related) stress. Make it open to discussion by admitting that it is a difficult subject, also for you, but that you are always there for your employees. That makes it easier for your employees to alert you to any problems. You can then look for solutions based on your shared responsibility.

If there are stress-related problems, talk to your employee. You can then find ways to enable your employee to recover some balance.

- 1 View the options at work. Perhaps the job can be made more manageable if your employee temporarily has fewer tasks. Or their job satisfaction will improve if they are given something different to do.
- 2 Offer your employee good support so that he can progress.
- 3 Also think about how you can encourage your employees to incorporate rest when they need it. Rested employees are ultimately more productive and healthier.
- 4 Ensure that you have a good work-related psychosocial stress policy in place and tell your employees about it.
- 5 Be prepared to talk to your employee if you feel he is not in the right place.



## If your employee takes stress-related sick leave

You may not exactly understand why your employee has taken stress-related sick leave. Nevertheless, you are required to follow the steps in the Wet Verbetering Poortwachter (Absenteeism Reduction Act). According to this law, as an employer, you are responsible for enabling the employee to return fully to work as soon as possible. Your employee must cooperate, supported by your occupational health department.

# Recognise the signals

Signals that can point to stress:

## Thinking

- indecisiveness/brooding
- concentration problems
- absent-minded/forgetful
- uninterested
- jumping from one thing to another/never finishing anything
- absent/confusing priorities

## Physical

- headache/neck or back pain
- sweating/poor sleep
- stomach or digestive problems
- restlessness/tiredness
- gaining/losing weight
- heart palpitations/dizziness

## Emotion

- dissatisfied/irritable
- insecure/unmotivated
- aggressive/uninterested
- apathetic
- mood swings
- hassled/guilt feelings

## Behaviour

- easily irritated/aggressive
- smoking/drinking more/inhibition
- increased use of medication
- crying easily/calling in sick more often
- being irritated by others
- poor performance/small accidents

# PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

## Discussing the issue

Our main advice: continue talking to each other. For tips on this, see page 16 of this guide. If you cannot find a solution together, ask an independent third party for help, such as the [company welfare department](#) (contact your regular contact person for more information).

## My organisation expert

Can you use help in tackling work pressure and increasing job satisfaction? That's what [My Organisation Expert](#) is for. Your partner

for finding employees for the long term. This experienced human resources & organisation consultant helps you in 2, 4 or 8 hours (on location or by phone). Call 030 299 62 77 for more information.

## Career development

Stress may also be caused because employees are working in a job that does not suit them. Or because their job may be disappearing. Look for a solution together. For example, career development via our sister company Focus.



## Online working from home check.

Via a video call, an ergonomist checks your home workplace. He gives targeted advice to optimally organise the workplace. The [check](#) goes further than just establishing an ergonomically good posture. It also examines the workload and the rhythm of the working day at home (call 030 299 62 77 for more information).



# Hybrid working: the right balance

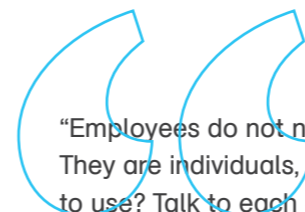
Our way of working has changed massively during the pandemic. From working from home as much as possible to a combination of home working and returning to the workplace: hybrid working. The ideal work situation is different for everyone. You and your employees will benefit a lot if you adapt to this and find the right balance between working from home and together at the office.



## Flex working is now a permanent feature

What most (employers of) people working from home have learned from coronavirus: working from home is fine. Recent TNO research showed that stress levels among people working from home are not too high. Many employees now even recognise the benefits.

What does produce stress in people working from home is that it is harder to concentrate at home. The work-life balance also presents a challenge. Nevertheless, most employees seem to manage it quite well.



“Employees do not necessarily suffer stress from working from home. They are individuals, so check what works for those individuals. The tool to use? Talk to each other. The main energy source to monitor employees working from home is coherence and cohesion, maintaining the connection with each other. This applies to colleagues amongst each other and to managers with their team. For managers, it is also important to make it clear that you see and support the employees.”

**Ronald Klee, human resources & organisation**



# Management style

Now that working from home seems here to stay, as an employer you must get used to managing from a distance. There are two points for attention here: focus on output and communication.

## Focus on output

Instead of focusing on hours and attendance, you trust your employees to plan their work more freely. They benefit from a better work-life balance and you get optimal output. You then focus on the result of the work. If you know exactly what someone must have delivered at the end of the day, week or month, the figures say enough. It is then not necessary to check up on your people.

## Good communication

Besides focusing on output, good communication is important. Show interest in your people. Particularly now that your team is working remotely. It might sound complicated, but in practice it only involves: a phone call, perhaps with video.

**“The greatest advantage of working from home is that it is more efficient. But the boundaries between work and home life are more easily blurred. I am now at home alone all day. I’m glad if I can occasionally get out.”**

## Examples: companies with a record of giving employees more freedom

Netflix no longer records when someone goes on holiday. According to Netflix, employees have a sufficiently well-developed sense of responsibility to do the right thing. The same applies to media and consultancy firm &samhoud. Productivity has

since risen. The municipality of Hollands Kroon notes that sick leave has fallen by around 4 percent to 2.5 percent. Spokesperson Noortje Slot from Hollands Kroon: “Our work is based on performance agreements. It’s about getting the results. So, it doesn’t matter how much you do or don’t work.” (Source: NOS)

**“At first, I worked at the kitchen table with the children and did home schooling. I soon moved upstairs and created my own workplace. This is much better. I am less easily distracted, feel more productive and have more time to reflect on my work. I can have meetings in peace and shut the door at the end of the working day. That allows me to separate work and home life to some extent.”**

(Source quotes homeworkers: AD)

## Freedom for everyone?

Freedom and autonomy are not for everyone. Some employees prefer more structure and control. Good management is therefore about customising your approach. By staying in touch with your employees, you know what they need and give them targeted feedback.

# 10 Tips for recharging home workers' batteries

- 1 A good basis. An ergonomic workplace and working ICT. Where possible, you facilitate this. Employees may borrow a chair from the office, are given a working from home allowance, or you arrange for an ergonomist to check their workplace and posture.
- 2 Your employees are aware of the risks of poor posture and a heavy workload and know what they can do about it.
- 3 There is a contact person who everyone can approach if they encounter issues in their work, perhaps specifically focused on working in the pandemic.
- 4 You continue to do fun activities, even if they need to be organised digitally.
- 5 If someone really feels the need to work at the office, perhaps because they cannot organise a good workplace at home, see what can be done (within the guidelines).
- 6 Make sure you meet up in person if you have not seen each other at work for a long time.
- 7 Do your best to find out what causes your employees' batteries to run down and particularly: how they can recharge them, even if they keep things to themselves. Keep talking to them.
- 8 Make a plan for new employees. They start online and probably find it harder to connect with the team. Create extra social support, via a buddy for example.
- 9 If necessary, call in a coach who your employees can contact.
- 10 Or make it clear that any employees who are really experiencing problems can always use the open consultation hours of the (company) doctor.

# WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

## Tackling work pressure in 5 steps

The atmosphere in the workplace has been worse than usual recently; work isn't getting done and communication is difficult. These can be signals that the work pressure within the team or your company is becoming excessive. How can you tackle the work pressure within your company effectively? The TNO Guide to Work Pressure recommends the following 5 steps:

### 1. Establish how high the work pressure is

Recognise the signals within your company and talk to your employees if you suspect that the work pressure is too high. If you conclude that the work pressure really is too high and you decide to do something about it, involve your employees in your plans.

### 2. Identify the causes

What are the causes of the excessive work pressure? Make a list of the most important issues. Start from those that generate the most problems and are viewed as such by the most people. Common issues are inadequate cooperation between departments or teams, policy that turns out to be impracticable or a mismatch between the skills and motivation of employees and the way employees are managed. Every issue has a different cause and therefore needs a different solution.

### 3. Devising solutions

If you know what the most important issues are, you can get to work on the solutions. Think about what actions need to be taken in order to reduce the work pressure. Set priorities and start with the actions that will yield the biggest results.

### 4. Action!

Agree who will do what, what the intended result is and get to work on it together. Share plans and actions with all your employees.

### 5. Celebrating successes and making adjustments

Keep monitoring progress. If the actions are producing results, celebrate those successes! And make adjustments where necessary. After a while, check whether the most important issues have been resolved and whether a new action list needs to be made.



# 10

## Conversation techniques

- 1 Ask open questions starting with 'how', 'what', 'who', 'which' and 'where'.
- 2 Allow silences to fall so that the other person is more likely to say what they feel.
- 3 Try to 'mirror' in your use of words and posture, so that the other person feels at ease.
- 4 Also show non-verbally that you are interested in the other person, by nodding and showing emotions at the right moments.
- 5 If the other person is emotional, it is good to first acknowledge those emotions. Identify the emotion you see.
- 6 Repeat the last words that someone has said, to really be clear what the other person means.
- 7 Or sometimes summarise what the other person says. The other person feels listened to and can add to or steer the conversation.
- 8 Use your own words when you summarise. If you do that well, the other person feels understood and may be able to see their own situation through your eyes.
- 9 Don't search for a solution for the other person. Let your employee suggest solutions. But provide constructive ideas.
- 10 Don't judge the situation and/or the other person's feelings.

**Is it too much to learn all at once? Don't worry. Most people master one or two of these techniques and even the best mediators often use three or four.**



# Stress as an entrepreneur

Employers may suffer various types of stress. Sometimes it may involve financial uncertainty or a heavy workload. Another important stressor is caused by 'issues' among personnel. How do you keep your head above water?

You run your own business and you work extremely hard. Whether the business is doing well or badly, issues may arise that will sometimes give you a sleepless night.

## This prevents sleepless nights

A well-known English saying is 'work hard, play hard'. In other words, if you work hard, you need to balance that with plenty of relaxation. In psychology, they also call this 'active relaxation'. If you schedule times for active relaxation, you will avoid skipping relaxation. For example, set yourself the goal of actively relaxing for one hour a day and schedule a time when you will do it.

## Passive relaxation

In passive relaxation, we watch Netflix, lounge on the sofa, snack. Stress levels go down, but there is one major disadvantage: it does not give us energy. And that energy is important.

## Active relaxation

With active relaxation, you do activities which energise you. What these are vary for each person.

Do you like to exhaust yourself during a bootcamp or spinning class? Do you enjoy (online) shopping? Or having drinks with friends in the evening, in person or online? Good examples of active relaxation in which you can block out your thoughts are walking, cycling or gardening.

## Is determination your weakness?

The average entrepreneur is famous for their considerable determination and energy. The strength is rooted in tireless input and passion. But every strength has a weakness. A pitfall in stressful times can be that your perseverance turns into stubbornness; persisting in the face of the evidence. Occasionally taking time for (active) relaxation is essential to enable you to keep working hard.

And if you cannot relax, get help. From our experts, for example. We will be happy to help.

"Employers are often extremely driven when it comes to their business. This enable them to grow their business and acts as a buffer if things are not going well. The same applies to the employees in the company. If they are empowered, they will flourish in their work. If things start to go wrong, a stressed employee can call in sick. That option is not usually a solution for employers. It is therefore even more important to look after yourself and ensure that you have enough time and space to recharge your battery"

**Sheila Peeters, company social worker at ArboNed**



# If you do not find a solution, we are there for you



The tips from this guide give you a basis for managing (work-related) stress among your employees. If you and your employees cannot find a solution, we at ArboNed are naturally always here for you. For example, with MyCoachLine, the advice from our (company) doctors or via My organisation expert

Someone who speaks your language and whose knowledge and experience prove that he is completely at your service. Someone who arranges things for you. Things which might seem small, but which can have a huge impact. Things which keep your company healthy. Among others, by keeping the people in your company healthy.

Our consultants work all over the country, so there is always an expert near you. Someone who understands you. Someone who knows how your sector works and who knows the situation.

**ArboNed**

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