CHAPTER 5

CREATING AND MAINTAINING COMPREHENSIVE STRESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING

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This chapter begins by establishing a philosophical basis for comprehensive stress management training which encourages each individual to become more self responsible and self determining, and suggests that the overall program must focus on dynamics within the organization as well as within the individual. It then goes on to describe an ideal program in relation to planning, goal setting, developing system support, and the technologies and resources needed. Ongoing program maintenance is discussed in relation to program evaluation processes, its relationship to other existing programs, and the need for the system itself to respond to issues identified in the program. The chapter does not provide specific instruction in stress management techniques or specific substantive information relative to stress management techniques.

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that stress management training has, over the past few years, become the most popular form of training available in American organizations. It's popularity is likely to continue, as people recognize that they are under more stress than is good for them, and that there are specific things they can do to combat the effects of excessive stress.

Whenever a training topic becomes popular, large numbers of full and part time trainers begin to offer the training as a part of their repertoire. Often, the result is that the topic becomes just another program from the training department. When this happens, the training program generally has little impact. It is likely that with increasing popularity, the quantity of stress training programs increases and the quality and impact of such training decreases in proportion. At this point, most of those employed as trainers in America have at least a "stress module" in their repertoire, while those trained in health protection and health care are just beginning to join in on the training ventures.

Another related problem is that most trainers keep themselves too busy conducting training programs to do any serious follow up impact studies on their work. Thus, at this point, relatively little is known about the relative impact of various approaches to conducting stress management training.

One of the basic questions which should be asked of a suggested stress training program is "what is the true purpose of the training?" Often, these programs are created in organizations as palliatives or

as one time efforts. They are the "thing to do", or it is felt that management has done its "bit for humanity" in offering stress courses -- and therefore, they need not worry further about the unnecessarily stressful environment they have created. My findings (Adams, et. al., 1983, 1984) about these kinds of training efforts have been that people are forced to protect themselves from their organizations. In six month post-training follow up studies, for example, I have found consistently that people will be getting more exercise, eating better, relaxing more, and so on, while feeling less satisfied and fulfilled at work and less supported on the job. When this finding is explored further, one finds that the stress training taught people to see clearly how minor managerial adjustments could reduce the level of unnecessary stress in the working environment. When they make suggestions, however, they are told to mind their own business or are ignored.

A large proportion of stress programs are sold by the trainers to their companies, and are offered as this year's "trick". When this is the case, the programs are most often not thought through carefully, but are merely added to the trainer's repertoire. Such programs generally have little if any long range effect.

If a stress management program is to have a strong impact on both health and performance, it needs to be conceived in and built on the clear purpose to make the system (organization) less unnecessarily stress provoking while at the same time enhancing individuals' abilities to cope and to thrive.

There are two basic life orientations, and the one which predominates in the individuals offering the program will have a major impact on how the program is conducted and whether or not it is effective in the long run. One of these, the Reactive-Responsive orientation, places the locus of control outside the individual as s/he reacts to stimuli from the environment and responds as effectively as possible to the constraints s/he faces. Programs based on this orientation will teach a lot of techniques for managing stress, but will contain the implicit message that stress comes from the environment and "you'll just have to make the best of it". Participants are not likely to derive long term benefits from such an approach. Rather, the approach will ultimately reinforce their feelings of powerlessness to cope effectively with a "hostile" environment.

The other is the Creative orientation, which views each individual as being the predominant creative force in her/his own life. Programs based on this orientation will focus on the underlying patterns in each person's consciousness which are the major determinants of what the person is getting from life. It will also teach participants how to develop creative orientations within themselves. Basic to this orientation is the individual's fundamental choice to be healthy. If an individual does not make this choice, stress management tricks are

not likely to be particularly useful in the long run. A stress program which is based mostly on the creative orientation is more likely to have a lasting impact on participants than is one based solely on the Reactive-Responsive orientation. (For a detailed development of these orientations, see Fritz, 1984.)

Comprehensive stress management programs must focus on both the individual and the system (Adams, 1981). On the individual level, there needs to be an external focus on avoiding or removing unnecessary stressors and on coping effectively with those stressors which are unavoidable (or the individual chooses not to avoid). In addition there needs to be an internal focus on health protection and enhancement and on attitudinal orientation as suggested in the previous paragraph.

These same considerations (removal, coping, health protection) also must be considered on the systems or organizational level. What can be done within the organizational system to remove or avoid inducing unnecessary stressors? In general, the answer to this question has to do with minimizing novelty (surprise, uncertainty) associated with the introduction of necessary changes and modifying stress provoking organizational norms. What can the organization be doing to equip members to handle necessary stressors effectively (e.g. effective problem solving, availability of training courses)? And finally, in what ways other than the stress management training programs can the organization encourage good health habits?

In summary, the "ideal" stress management program receives managerial support across the organization. There is a feedback loop created in which systems-oriented ideas for reducing the number of unnecessary stressors and for coping effectively with the necessary ones are encouraged and taken seriously. The training programs themselves encourage and foster the creative orientation referred to above in which individual organization members learn to operate from the fundamental choices to be creative and to have full and vibrant health.

AN IDEAL WORKSITE STRESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

Conceptualizing the Program

Clear, understood, and accepted goals are an essential starting point for an effective stress management training program. When the goals of any training program are unclear, the program results are bound to be diluted. Griffen, et. al. (1982) have suggested six criteria for setting goals for an effective stress management training program:

1. Make the goals as specific as possible
2. Make the goals measurable
3. Ensure that the goals are realistic/attainable
4. Include both individual and organizational benefits

5. Elicit the support and endorsement of top management
6. Focus on attitudinal adjustments, modifications of behavior, skills to be acquired.

The absence of clear goals, or desired results, is probably the most frequent cause of low impact stress training. The above criteria should provide the program initiator with sufficient guidance to undertake a highly successful program.

One should note at this point that the second criterion is that goals should be measurable. This is essential to the establishment of an effective evaluation process. In fact, if the evaluation of the impact of the program is to be useful, it must be designed at this point, prior to the conduct of the program.

Once the goals are clear, they can be broken down into specific program objectives. The format for establishing goal related objectives advanced by Loughary and Hopson (1979), outlined below, is a very useful one.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES		
	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
...	...	...	...
Review present responses to stress	Understand framework for stress mgt.	Able to identify own warning warning signals of excessive stress	It's necessary for me to take responsibility for my own well being
ETC.	ETC.	ETC.	ETC.

Acquiring System Support

If one can negotiate the key goals of the program with top management, and then identify the specific objectives associated with each, the design and development of the program usually fall nicely into place. When this goal/objective setting step is rushed or overlooked, the design and development phases generally take much longer and the resulting program is generally lacking in focus.

As has been stated, top level support is crucial for a stress management program to have lasting impact on the participants and on the organization. With this support, feedback loops can be created by means of which the "system" can respond to ideas and issues which emerge during the course of the training.

It is also possible, with such support, for the stress management training program to actively consider how the culture of the organization is both an asset and a liability to effective stress management. For example, if one of the elements of the organization's culture which people identify as stressful is that no one ever gives any performance feedback except when mistakes are made, there is little hope of engendering more positive performance feedback without the active involvement of senior managers.

When solid support from management is lacking, the nature of the stress management training is necessarily different. Rather than including a systems perspective on how to respond to the stressors in the working environment, one must focus the training primarily on teaching the participants to protect themselves from their own organizations!

One of the most effective ways to elicit top management support is to present a statistical summary of the costs of unaddressed stress. Such summaries are relatively easy to construct, as national health statistics are readily available from the Center for Disease Control, plus many of the popular books on stress and health published over the past 10 years. One can also easily access the trend in the organization's health care payments for the last several years in most organizations. In some cases, more specific stress related health care costs are available within the organization (turnover and absenteeism rates, prevalence of hypertension, etc.). With a little more digging, the hidden overhead costs for replacing personnel can be estimated with some accuracy. The figure usually comes out to be close to the average salary plus benefits for the position being filled. When one begins to develop such estimates, the magnitude of unaddressed stress becomes evident, and the impetus for developing a high impact stress management training program grows.

Another consideration in engendering system support for the intended stress management training program is in relating the program to other training seminars already available to members of the organization. It can be argued that any training seminar which helps people do their work better with less tension is a "stress management" training program. With this perspective, aligning the stress management training program with these other programs becomes an obvious thing to do. With a broad sense of integration across the spectrum of training resources available, all of the programs will benefit and have greater impact.

Ensuring that the program is conducted by people with adequate resources is also of utmost importance. Stress management training is quite different from other kinds of training programs, which are generally based on a single discipline such as social psychology. Stress management training, on the other hand, necessarily is highly multi-disciplinary, drawing on such diverse fields as psychology,

physiology, anatomy, nutrition, endocrinology, systems theory, sociology, and so on. The trainer needs to be able to communicate the interrelationships of very complex information in language which is easily understood by the participants. Further, the trainer must know the currently acceptable tenets in each of these diverse fields, in order to debunk the plethora of media-mythologies and fads. And finally, if external trainers are used, there need to be some direct forms of internal staff involvement created to handle the likely needs for follow ups arising from the training.

The creation of a comprehensive stress management training program may necessitate the coordination of several different expert resources, if a single person with the broad range of knowledge and skills required is not available. There may also be personnel in the organization who have developed specialized expertise in certain relevant areas who might often be overlooked (e.g., a secretary who has learned an extensive amount about nutrition and would like to share her ideas). It is essential that the lead trainers be role models for the client population. One of the fastest ways to kill a stress management training program is to have it taught by someone who obviously is a poor stress manager! One is never "finished" in his or her development of stress management skills, but in order to have credibility, one must be seriously "in process" and be able to be articulate about what s/he is doing about his or her own stress.

Yet another factor in establishing and maintaining support for the program has to do with effective overall planning. Griffen, et al. (1982) have outlined a useful progression of planning steps, suggested means for assessing the systems readiness for stress management training, and outlined a strategy for working with resistance to the program. Their suggestions are presented in the following lists:

STEPS IN PLANNING A STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

- o Assess and measure each employee's stress level
- o Assess present adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies
- o Determine the major stressors in the workplace
- o Explain what stress is
- o Explain the personal health implications
- o Identify individuals' symptoms of excessive stress
- o Identify personal causes of stress
- o Describe various stress management strategies
- o Develop personalized action plans

(For more details on the planning points listed above, see Adams, 1981, Adams, et. al., 1983, and Adams, et. al., 1984).

DEVELOPING READINESS FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING

- o Assess position of top management
- o Areas of concern clearly identified
- o Coordinate with relevant departments (medical, HRD, etc.)
- o Identify what the program is meant to accomplish
- o Identify needed training resources
- o Anticipate and address criticisms
- o Develop means of assessing impact
- o Identify target population
- o Determine course content and focus
- o Select program title with desired effect
- o Check out the instructors

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

- o Gather data on cost effectiveness
- o Cultivate a clear understanding that the stress response is a natural biological response, not a characterological weakness or an indicator of poor mental health
- o Establish that stress management training is for prevention, and that it is neither treatment nor a form of therapy
- o Demonstrate that it is a lot more than a single technique (such as relaxation)

In a similar vein, McCauley and Bellingham (1984) have developed a list of pitfalls to avoid in their health promotion work at the New York Telephone Company.

COMMON ERRORS TO AVOID

- o FRAGMENTATION: unrelated and unintegrated programs
- o ACTIVITIES: creating diverse activities without articulating desired results
- o ILLNESS FOCUS: a successful program will focus on establishing and maintaining well-being
- o LACK OF INVOLVEMENT: the more people involved in some way with program development and conduct, the more excitement and enthusiasm
- o UNAPPLIED KNOWLEDGE: facts don't change behavior; teachable skills are the tools for success
- o INDIVIDUAL FOCUS: if the organization's culture is not addressed, impact is limited
- o EMPHASIS ON START UP: a successful program must be based on a long term view

TECHNOLOGIES, RESOURCES AND STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

Once the above points have been taken into consideration, there are still a number of more specific points which need to be included in the development of the stress management training program.

PREWORK: Some form of prework, such as having participants complete some stress level assessments and/or a health risk appraisal can be a very valuable component of the program. In addition to saving time in the program itself, participants are stimulated to begin thinking about their experiences of stress as a result of responding to such diagnostic questionnaires.

BALANCE: There needs to be a balance established in the training among lecture, reading, activities, instrumentation, and audio-visual presentations. While trainers vary in their preferences, an overload of any of these design possibilities will diminish the impact of the program, as will the total absence of any of them.

PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH: If one is going to lead a training group in yoga exercises, one should first be a regular yoga practitioner. If one is going to teach meditation techniques, one should be a regular meditator. And so on.

SELF-DIRECTED PACKAGES: There are a great many self guided or self directed stress management packages in the marketplace and, in general, that is where they should remain. The only usefulness they have is to supplement group training activities. When these packages are made available in lieu of training, they are generally not used well and are a waste of money.

NUTRITION: Many stress management training programs overlook the importance of nutrition. Healthful meals and breaks can easily be provided in most instances. Material needs to be made available explicating the interactions of blood sugar, fats, salt, fiber, water soluble vitamins and stress.

LOCATION: Off-site locations are preferable whenever feasible. Programs conducted on site have a great deal more difficulty holding the participants' attention. Many participants' experiences of the training become fragmented by coffee break visits to the office and the "inevitable" emergencies which arise.

COMPOSITION: The initial groups generally must be heterogeneous, but succeeding groups should be made up of teams whenever possible. This allows for the resolution of stressful shared bad habits such as poor communications, sweeping disagreements under the rug, providing only negative performance feedback, and so on.

PREVENTIVE: If the program develops a "touchy-feely" reputation, it won't last long. It is imperative that stress management training programs be clearly seen by organizational members as being rooted in an illness prevention and health promotion context.

REFERRALS: It is very important that stress management trainers be able to make knowledgable referrals for specific conditions beyond the scope of the training (e.g. alcoholism) both inside and outside the organization. From time to time, people will appear in stress management training who are experiencing possibly stress related conditions such as chronic anxiety, recurring headaches, hypertension, and so on, seeking an easy "cure". It should be clear that stress management training is not the place to treat chronic situations such as these even if they are stress related. It is important for the program leader to either be well versed in identifying problems which need referral or have access to such a person, so that appropriate referrals can be made.

PROGRAMMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

There are also some additional considerations having to do with program decisions which need to be spelled out. A comprehensive stress management training program, one which offers participants a broad array of options to follow (as in a "cafeteria"), needs to be of substantial length. A two day program is just about the minimum amount of time that must be devoted to such a program -- with three to five day programs having demonstrably higher impact. It also is imperative that such programs be offered on company time, and that participants be given release from their normal duties to attend. If this is not done, employees quickly develop the idea that the organization isn't really serious about the program. It should also be obvious that conducting the program after normal working hours or on weekends, so as not to lose employee time at work is more than a little antithetical to the underlying message of the program.

When the desired comprehensive program cannot be offered all at once, there are some advantages to offering it a module at a time (e.g. for half a day at a time over a period of several weeks). This model allows for participants to go into some depth in each area of training, plus it presents an opportunity to do homework practices between each session, with reportbacks on progress. The shortcoming is that participation falls off, as people have "emergencies" arising in their work. (It is incredible how often participants in this format find that they have too many stressful things going on in their work to complete the stress course!)

Another programmatic concern is whom to invite to participate. Too often, these programs are made available to management only, while the highest stress levels are most likely experienced by clerical staff, the first line supervisors and their workers. Relatedly, it is

important to establish the image that the stress response is a normal, biological response, and that it is natural. Everyone in the organization is subject to the adverse consequences of excessive stress. And finally, wherever possible, spouses of employees should be invited to participate. If a participant concludes during the stress management training that s/he needs to make some fundamental life style changes, there is a much greater chance s/he will succeed if this conclusion is reached in the presence of the spouse.

Following the completion of a comprehensive stress management program, people often feel the need for more specific or focused training experiences to follow up. If there is a broad array of programs available within the organization, their relationship to reducing stress should be made clear. It is often helpful also to have a listing of specialized programs available in the community.

Another important programmatic feature is the establishment of individual plans for action. If people are going to make use of what they learn in any training program, they need to take some specific steps with their new learnings within two or three days of the end of the training. It is therefore important that participants be guided into a specific project area to work on first (one should adopt a one step at a time mentality), and then to identify the specific action steps they will begin taking within the next few days. The likelihood of positive, lasting impact of the training will be further increased if the individual action plans include a review of one's support network and a determination of how specific other people can operate in ways to guarantee the participant's success in her/his action plans.

Next, feedback loops need to be established to deal with themes or issues which emerge from the stress management training at the managerial or policy level of the organization. Invariably, many of the things which participants identify as being their primary stressors have to do with the careless implementation of changes and the existence of shared "bad habits" within the organization. Many such unnecessary stressors can be alleviated if there is a mechanism created (e.g. a stress reduction task force) to address them on an organization wide basis.

A final programmatic issue has to do with the creation of follow up booster sessions for participants six months to a year after their initial training. People inevitably will experience some frustrations and loss of momentum even after the best possible training efforts, and follow up sessions can often address problems of motivation and get people back on the track. People will respond most favorably to these follow up sessions if they see that "management" is doing something procedurally about stress in the organization. If they learned in their original training that a few simple changes within the system could alleviate a lot of the stress they experience, and

then see that the powers that be in the system do not respond to their suggestions, any attempts to do follow up "booster sessions" will most likely result only in a great deal of cynicism.

ON-GOING PROGRAM MAINTENANCE

Evaluation

One of the most frequently overlooked aspects of most training which is conducted in the United States today is evaluation. Most programs do have some sort of satisfaction measure taken at the conclusion of the training which is of the "did the dogs like the dog food?" variety. Course evaluations of this sort have some usefulness to the training staff relative to specific techniques or design features used, but after several programs, most trainers see the same pluses and minuses over and over again and are more likely to rationalize the reasons for the minuses and generally ignore the results of the evaluation.

Of greater importance to the overall success of a comprehensive stress management training program is a form of evaluation which is seldom undertaken by training departments -- an evaluation of the actual impact of the training on the lives of the participants. For example, after six months, how many have sustained significant changes in their life styles? How many have lowered their blood pressure or lost weight or stopped smoking or continued to practice the relaxation habits they have learned. Have absenteeism and turnover been reduced? Has morale increased? More difficult to get at and even more important to measure is the degree to which the person has altered her/his attitudes and expectations about stress and her/his ability to respond effectively. Impact measures such as these need to be tied to the original objectives of the course and need to be measured prior to the training to provide some basis for comparison at some point after the training.

Over the course of the program, as several courses have been offered and the impact evaluations begin to accumulate, those responsible for the stress management training will note patterns in the long term responses to their program, which they can consider in redesigning and continually refining the program. While it is nice to get "high marks" on course reaction forms, the true test of the effectiveness of stress management training can only be measured in terms of how people are thinking and acting differently a significant period of time after the course has ended.

Context of Other Programs

A major segment of the stress management repertoire that is taught in a comprehensive program introduces the notion of behavioral and interpersonal skills as being necessary to make effective responses in

stressful situations. As such, every training program offered by the training staff of most organizations is conceivably a stress management program to the extent that it helps people to do their work more effectively and with less hassle. Thus, embedding the stress management training course in the context of training in the organization is important. If it is offered as something entirely separate from other training programs, it will not serve the participants as effectively as if it is seen as a central part of the training.

By the same token, in many organizations, there are many staff services available to employees that are of relevance to the stress management training and these connections should be made for the participants. Included would be Employee Assistance Programs, other counseling programs, medical department services (if there is an interest in prevention), emergency personal services programs, Human Resources programs, and so on. Every service offered to employees is conceivably of some relevance to a comprehensive stress management training program, and care should be taken to establish and nurture the relationships among these services as the stress management training proceeds. If one or more of these services becomes alienated or turns against the stress management program, the program's credibility will suffer.

System Response

One effective framework for assessing the effectiveness of stress management suggests three levels of response. The first two levels, (1) avoiding or removing stress and (2) coping effectively with stress, are focused on adjusting the stress levels individuals are experiencing. The third level, building and protecting health, has to do with developing the individuals' capacities (reserves) to withstand the rigors of working in a stressful environment. It should be obvious that there are many facets to each of these three levels which individuals need to be taught in a comprehensive stress management training program. What is often less obvious are ways the system can respond on each of these three levels to cut down on the amount of unnecessary stress generated and to encourage individuals to look after their health and well-being. Some system level ideas follow.

Removal or Avoidance of Stressors: The organization can help to avoid creating a lot of episodic stress for its members by ensuring effective communications about necessary changes and taking other steps to minimize the amount of surprise and uncertainty (novelty) so often associated with complex change processes in organizations. Further, the organization can encourage face to face work groups to identify the stressful habits or norms affecting their work and to take steps to alter these norms. Thirdly, different styles of decision making and policy formulation may be necessary. Finally, organizations can often take the heat off, at least temporarily, by rotational work assignments.

Coping Effectively with Unavoidable Stressors: The organization can help its members cope with stressors on a day to day basis if it encourages the use of effective problem solving techniques, rather than letting expedience or internal political dynamics "solve" the problems which inevitably arise. Second, employee education is increasingly necessary. In addition to making stress management training available to employees, organizations should identify the specific interpersonal skills needed by its members and make sure that training in these skills is readily available. Third, rather than just removing stress "casualties" from the organization after they have burned out, organizations need to be providing competent, confidential counseling and referral services for those who have problems, and they need to reach these people before their problems become overwhelming.

Building and Protecting Health: Organizations can help their members protect themselves by encouraging and supporting good individual self-management practices. This support needs to be manifested through such things as quiet rooms and relaxation instruction; exercise facilities and instruction; and the availability of healthful foods in cafeterias and vending machines. Verbal support of the program, without these tangible manifestations of that support are merely platitudes which employees quickly see through. Finally, task forces can be created (with real tasks and authority!), to further develop long term protection against the kinds of stress which arise when organizational units are overly differentiated from each other and/or often in conflict with each other.

In summary, a good, comprehensive, preventive approach to stress management requires that both individuals and the organization at large assume specific responsibilities. Neither must be allowed to abdicate these responsibilities. The illustrations given above apply to most organizations. Each organization needs to develop its own unique responses to stress on each level.

SUMMARY

This chapter closes by returning to the questions raised in the opening paragraphs. Perhaps the most important question to answer is "what results do you want to create?" Many training programs are so busily focused on the process of training and the "latest" techniques that this question isn't even asked, let alone clearly answered.

There are at least three categories of focus or orientation which have a bearing on this question of desired results. First, should the program have an individual focus or will it include systemic issues such as management procedures and corporate habit patterns. Programs which include this systemic focus are most likely to have a sustained positive impact. Without this systemic focus, the most that can be done is to teach people how to protect themselves from their own working environments!

Second, should the program have a single focus (e.g. relaxation techniques) or be as comprehensive as possible? It should be clear from the foregoing that stress is a complex process and that individuals need to establish their own self-tailored response repertoires. Any given focus will work for some and not for others. The broader the focus, the better able people will be to develop a response repertoire that is effective.

Third, should the program reinforce our reactive-responsive programming reacting to the environment and responding to external pressures -- placing the locus of control outside the individual, who never finishes reacting and responding; or should it emphasize the development of a more creative orientation -- placing the locus of control within the individual, who learns to establish clear pictures of the desired life and then operates in ways to realize the results. It is the contention of this chapter that to be truly effective, stress management training programs must foster the emergence of a more creative consciousness than most of us have developed so far.

Stress management training today is often just another training program offered widely in organizations. It CAN have a major effect on individual life orientation and choice making AND on system culture and functioning. The impact a stress management program will have is largely a function of how clearly one answers the question "What results to you want?"

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STRESS MANAGEMENT IN WORK SETTINGS

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