

STRESS MANAGEMENT AT TRW

Samuel A. Shirley*

Before I talk about what we are doing at TRW in the area of stress management, I would like to tell you something about TRW defense and space systems group, to give you a background and a perspective. I think that is important because the environment we live in has a great number of stressors in it. There may not be more stressors than in any other environment, but certainly some are unique to ours.

First of all, we are in a high technology business. We are involved with large electronic systems, hardware and software. We are in major software programs, we do systems engineering for the Air Force and other government facilities on major systems that they have, and we design, build and fly unmanned spacecraft. We never get those spacecraft back, so they have to work the first time. We are in an increasingly competitive business. TRW and a couple of other companies were the forerunners in the advanced technology business. Now there are a lot of companies in the field. Everybody is getting very good at it so our competition is really tough right now.

There is increasing pressure from the customer with respect to cost and schedules. The day of the cost-plus contract is over. We are in increasingly difficult technological fields. The most recent example was the Viking biological instrument which, I am sure you are aware, was the instrument in the Viking Lander that went to Mars to see if there is a precursor of life on that planet. Not being a technical man myself, I went over to the program office one day when they were in the middle of this project. I asked what was going on and they said, "Well, so you can understand it, what we're doing is taking the equivalent of a university biological laboratory and reducing it to one foot cubed. We're packaging it. We're heating it and cooling it and putting it in a spacecraft that will transcend space and the environments and have a soft landing on Mars. Then a little arm has to come out and dig a bunch of soil, drop it in it, and that all has to work." And I said, "Okay," and went back to my office. Because I would not know where to start.

The reason for mentioning these projects is that the people who come to work here thrive on this sort of work, but they are also, I think, greatly stressed by it.

Finally, I think that generally it is harder to cope these days. Systems do not work anymore. I recently had the good fortune to go to Europe. I worked in Germany and then I went to France. One of the first things I did in Germany was miss the trolley out to the company I was to go to because I was three minutes late. In the United States the bus arrives plus or minus five minutes (or more) from its scheduled arrival. The rest of the ten days in Germany I did not miss the trolley! And I had a unique kind of calmness about me at that level which I did

*Director of Training and Organization Development, TRW--Defense and Space Systems Group, Redondo Beach, California

not realize until later. But one afternoon in the Hamburg airport I climbed on Air France and the next five days were insane. The airplane taxied around the airport twice, we were late taking off and within the next three hours my tension level was back up. And what I discovered at that point was that I had gotten very comfortable with an outside environmental system that was working. I think that is true of all of us today.

Internally at TRW there are tremendous pressures to stay technically current. Some of you who are in the technology field will know that given today's rapid technological advance, a person coming out of graduate school of a major university with a master's in the sciences or engineering is technically current for no more than three and a half to four years. That means if he does nothing else he is going to be obsolete in terms of next year's work. The pressure to stay technically current is tremendously high.

Again there is the cost and schedule problem--a shift from cost-plus to fixed price. We just won a multi-million dollar project--a five-year contract to build an unmanned spacecraft to be used by Western Union and NASA. We do not know what is going to happen in five years in terms of the economy and technology. But we bid a fixed price in terms of today's dollars. That is what our technical work force faces at TRW. Again, I am not saying this as "poor me!" But this is the stuff you sign up for and what happens to you when you go to work in a company like ours.

Finally, there have been a lot of new policies and procedures due to federal and state legislation which all of you are familiar with. As if that was not enough, about eighteen months ago we had a major reorganization!

About two or three years ago we began to see what we thought were products of this increasing stress in our system. There were more unexplained incidences in our high pressure programs at critical times. At the high vacuum test time, or the delivery time, or when perhaps the spacecraft would go from manufacturing into integration and test, there were more accidents. There were more antennas being broken or equipment being dropped. There was a rash of this sort of thing. We began to say, "Well, we've been pretty lucky up until now, and that's just what's going on." But it kept happening.

Secondly, there was a clear increase of referrals by our medical and industrial relations staff to physicians, psychiatrists and local agencies in the psychological field. We have had an ongoing program to facilitate and support employees getting psychological help in terms of dollars and time to see the doctors. This is covered in our major medical plan. But we began to see a marked increase in these kinds of incidences.

Thirdly, there was a kind of general dissatisfaction with the world. We do a great deal of what we call "employee sensing." We take a random sample of the employees, or cross-section of our work force in a unit, and we sit down and say: "Hey, what's it like to be in TRW today?" "What are the good things and what are the things you'd like changed?" We do that with a facilitator from industrial relations and also a key manager from that unit, so that the data is acted upon. In some of these sessions we began to see a growing kind of universal "ain't it awful!"--ain't-it-awful about affirmative action, you are not doing enough or you are doing too much; ain't-it-awful about inflation, you only gave us an "x" percent raise and the costs have gone up "x+" percent, and how do I keep five percent--a general dissatisfaction with the world. We have an internal grievance procedure in the company and the number of these grievances began to increase and

they were not around things that were very substantive. I do not mean that the people did not feel pain or that they were not agitated about something, but the grievances were about things that were hard to act on as: "I'd like my supervisor to stop picking on me!", "I'd like to not be discriminated against," "I'd like this-or-that." It wasn't "I want five more dollars!" or "I want to be promoted!" A general unrest was going on in the organization.

There was an increase in employee-supervisor requests for counseling. We do not have yet a formal counseling program at TRW, but we do have a lot of people in the work force, and particularly in the medical and industrial relations staff, with skills in a variety of counseling fields. And we found that as the word got out that we could do some of this, we got more and more requests. They were looking for ways to cope with supervisor-subordinate problems, they were looking for ways to cope with job pressures, with violated career expectations, with the fact that we were not growing at thirty percent a year anymore, so everybody is not going to get promoted and there was a flattening out in the organization. There were lots of tensions in the system, and people were beginning to ask for help. I think that is what is significant about that.

And finally, and most importantly, we began to get an increase in the number of voluntarily reported emotional-crisis incidents during working hours. "Voluntarily reported" are important words. Up to that point--two or three years ago--people would usually go to the medical staff and be referred outside. We now had people coming into personnel managers, industrial relations managers, and secretaries in the personnel offices with real full-blown emotional crises going on right then. A man would come into work and say to his supervisor, "I'm not going to talk to anybody this morning." Then he would go to his desk and sit down. Now the supervisor says to himself, "Wow! What do I do now?" An employee comes in from the parking lot and says to the guard, "I'm sure that most of the security officers, including you, are out to get me!" An employee comes into a personnel manager to ostensibly talk about career planning and halfway through the first fifteen minutes (this happened to be a woman) says, "Men are no goddamned good!" and begins to break down.

So we began to feel that something was going on here. There was not a lot of hard data and, scientifically, any of the incidents would not stand on its own. But put together, we felt we had a situation we had to deal with.

In terms of what to do, we had some ideas. Earlier we had done some work on a large career and personal counseling program which has not been implemented in the organization as yet. But that background was there. We decided, first of all, to train some of the inside people. We initiated a series of crisis-counseling training sessions with the industrial relations staff and the medical staff. Personnel managers, administrators, and medical people as well as the secretaries and non-exempt people who worked in those personnel management offices were included. The latter were included because a lot of times when a person in crisis comes in, the first desk he bumps into is that of a secretary. We did this for a couple of reasons. One was to increase the skills and lower the anxiety of the personnel people who had to deal with these problems as they had not had any previous training. Secondly, we did not really want to make these folks therapists. What we were really talking about was "emotional first aid." How do you get people in crisis grounded? How do you stabilize them? Whom do you ask for help and how do you get it? Thirdly, we wanted to provide a data base of services in the community that our personnel and medical staff could use to refer people to. And finally we wanted to create for the industrial relations staff

a support system for themselves so that they could sit down and begin to talk about the "cases" they were involved with. If we had not had the crisis-intervention training, two personnel managers from two different divisions would not have known that the crises they were working on were one and the same--a man and woman who allegedly were having problems at home and came to these two personnel managers independently. The interventions of those two personnel managers were quite different the minute that they knew they had a connection. The managers not only had a support system between the two of them and the rest of us, but they also did some different things because they knew what the other parties were doing. So there was some synergy in that situation.

Secondly, we decided to try to increase the population's general awareness of stress and what you can do about it. We did that in a number of simple ways and are still doing it. We gathered reading material and passed it out. That little booklet from Blue Cross, *STRESS*, is a very good basic book on stress and stress management. We have put on a couple of colloquia at TRW on stress management. We had about five or six hundred people attend, which means that stress is an interesting subject to the work force. We promoted attendance at conferences such as this one and some of our line managers began to go.

Thirdly, in addition to training and increasing awareness, we wanted to get some management attention on the problem. So in our supervisory training we began to talk to first-level supervisors about what a crisis is and what emotional upheaval is. We told them that when a crisis happens in front of them at their workplace, things are not really coming unglued, but somebody is in trouble, in pain. The managers had to be aware of it, needed to care, and needed to try to get help. We tried to show them where some help was available in the industrial relations staff.

In our middle management program, basic management development and our project management program, we have included a module on stress. We have done some of the things we are doing here today, including relaxing techniques. We try to make our managers aware that, yes, they are managing a fifty million dollar spacecraft with all its complexity but the people who are carrying out the work are under tremendous stress trying to meet the cost, schedule, and all the technological needs of that program. And we give them simple kinds of information, such as, if somebody on your key team has had two major things happen to them in their life recently, you can bet he is in some kind of stress, and you can bet the stress will manifest itself on the job. So if you have someone in that situation, think first before you put him on a thirty-five or forty hour vacuum test. You may want to reassign him, you may want to postpone the test, or do something else. But you must be aware of what is going on.

In the education area we are planning within the next few months to begin a course which is going to be conducted by one of our project managers. This is great as far as we are concerned because then it's not the industrial relations guy coming down the line with a new program. Instead it is a highly respected manager who is running a major spacecraft program who is going to conduct a ten-week course in stress management. We are going to offer it in our after-hours program. Additionally, we are going to offer some relaxation techniques workshops in which we will use biofeedback, meditation exercises and other methods to make people aware of the need to take time to relax. So, our strategy in this whole area then is to start slowly and keep it small until we get a better idea of what we are doing! Because right now we do not know what we do not know about this whole field. I

am convinced of this lack of knowledge generally and I know it is true in TRW. We have many more questions than answers. In fact, some of the feedback from our colloquia was, "the presenters were great but you violated my expectations because you didn't tell me how to manage my stress. You just didn't tell me all the things I need to know when I feel stress." We need to understand what our employees' expectations are.

We need to keep a focus on the following things. You cannot eliminate stress, it is going to be with us. Secondly, you can reduce some of its sources by knowing what causes it and plan accordingly. As an example, if you know a guy is under a lot of stress, you do not put him on a critical test. You get somebody else. You encourage people to talk about their stress and get help. It has only been in the last couple of years that the general population has accepted psychiatry or therapy for the normal and not seen it as a remedial "I'm-terribly-sick" kind of a phenomenon. People are now going to therapists and others just to build their strengths and skills. We want to keep that tendency at TRW going and we tell our employees "It's okay to ask for help if you're in pain, and if you think you need it." And finally we want supervision to be sensitive to stress and caring about its employees. These are the kinds of things I am interested in promoting right now.

Now, as far as the future is concerned, I am excited about a number of things. One of the things I think we ought to do is to expand on what we now know. We have some glimmerings of some of the things that work and I think that over time we are going to broaden the scope of those things. What I think we are going to add in the next few years is probably crisis intervention training for supervisors. I am becoming more and more convinced that that is where the action is. All the crises do not happen in the personnel manager's office--they happen right in front of you. So if we somehow give the supervisors some more training--not to change their primary job of supervising the work that needs to be done--but to add a dimension to that job which says, "Here are some tools, and part of your responsibility is to have to deal with this, whether you like it or not!"

Secondly, I think more energy of mine--and some others whom I can coerce into it--is needed in the career and personal counseling field. I think that in ten years most major companies will have some kind of career-personal counseling service offered to its employees in some way. I hate to have to wait ten years--I think we ought to be doing it now. But I have not yet been able to convince everybody I need to on that score.

Thirdly, we are going to continue to do some things like personal worth workshops. One that we are planning this next year is a life transition workshop. I think a lot of the stress we get, whether you go into a work place or not, has to do with how we live our lives these days and what the transitions are. For instance, people come up closer to retirement and they are not ready to quit. The work force tends to get younger, not older, in terms of spirit and physical condition. I think we need to be looking in those areas.

I have given you a sense of our program. You will not find a director of stress management at TRW. You are not going to find a manager of crisis. There are a number of us who have been together in this whole effort and we are still moving. We think we have got something substantive which is going to emerge and evolve. We want to continue to develop an awareness of the subject of stress and secondly, develop methods and tools for people, supervisors as well as the employees, to

cope with it. And finally I think we need to continue to do the research and the questioning--we need to get smarter. I think that is what we are doing here today--sharing information. I am fascinated by some of the information I have heard here today.

I appreciate being able to come here and tell you something about my excitement and what we are doing at TRW.

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NIOSH Project Officer: M.J. Smith, Ph.D.
Principal Director: Angus Macleod
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