

*These industry experts outline what steps to take to ensure job-related stresses don't batter your bottom line.*

# SAGE ADVICE



# Don't Blow Your Top

---

**You have undoubtedly seen the signs.**

An unhappy customer returns an item to your store, complaining about the quality. Instead of politely listening to her complaints, your employee is abrupt, rude, and engages the customer in an argument. Or, a longtime trusted employee begins to make mistakes in handling money or is so preoccupied that she slips and falls.

These are among the many potential signs of employee stress—stress that left unchecked can cost you, the retail employer, a bundle. Whether your employees' stress is directly related to the job or predominantly due to problems at home, failing to address it can result in increased injury, illness, deterioration in performance, and the loss of good workers and customers.

According to the American Institute of Stress, job-related stress costs US employers \$300 billion per year in absenteeism, employee turnover, reduced productivity, and direct medical, legal, and insurance costs. Numerous studies have found that overtime and extended work shifts increase job stress and its impacts. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reviewed 52 research reports on the association between working long hours and illnesses, injuries, health behaviors, and performance (see sidebar below).



## Resources

- **American Institute of Stress** ([www.stress.org](http://www.stress.org)) Click on "Job Stress."
- **American Psychological Association** ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)) Assistance in locating psychologists in your area.
- **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)** The NIOSH Safety and Health Topic Web page, "Work Schedules: Shift Work and Long Work Hours" ([www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/workschedules](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/workschedules)), includes a link to the publication *Overtime and Extended Work Shifts: Recent Findings on Illnesses, Injuries and Health Behaviors*. The NIOSH Safety and Health Topic Page, "Stress at Work" ([www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/stress](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/stress)), includes a link to the publication *STRESS... At Work*. A 17-minute NIOSH video entitled *Working with Stress* is at [www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/video/stress1.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/video/stress1.html).



## Job Conditions That May Lead to Stress

**The Design of Tasks.** Heavy workload; infrequent rest breaks; long work hours and shift work; hectic and routine tasks that have little inherent meaning, do not utilize workers' skills, and provide little sense of control.

**Management Style.** Lack of participation by workers in decisionmaking, poor communication in the organization, lack of family-friendly policies.

**Interpersonal Relationships.** Poor social environment and lack of support or help from co-workers and supervisors.

**Work Roles.** Conflicting or uncertain job expectations, too much responsibility, too many "hats" to wear.

**Career Concerns.** Job insecurity and lack of opportunity for growth, advancement, or promotion; rapid changes for which workers are unprepared.

**Environmental Conditions.** Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, air pollution, or ergonomic problems.

(Source: *STRESS... At Work*, NIOSH)

### Among the many findings:

- In 16 of 22 research studies, **overtime work** was associated with increased injury rates, a greater number of illnesses, poorer perceived general health, or increased deaths. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) recently reported that its preliminary 2008 data shows workplace suicides were up 28% in 2008 over 2007.
- Six studies that examined **12-hour shifts combined with more than 40 hours of work per week** found deterioration in performance, a slower pace of work, or an increase in health complaints.
- Four studies reported that the **ninth to 12th hours of work** in 12-hour shifts were associated with increased fatigue, feelings of decreased alertness, lower cognitive function, declines in vigilance on tasks, and increased injuries.

Retail work can be very stressful in and of itself, particularly at this time of the year. NIOSH notes there is increasing evidence that stress plays a role in several types of chronic health problems, especially cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders. In extreme situations, job-related stress can result in workplace violence, such as an incident that occurred in Montana where a discount store employee shot a co-worker in the head during an alleged argument over the length of the co-worker's work break.

### Steps for retail employers

There are a number of steps you as a retail owner or manager can take to reduce your employees' job-related stress and the resulting high costs to your operation. A good first step is to understand the definition of job-related stress. In a publication entitled *STRESS... At Work*, NIOSH defines job stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, and needs of the worker.

Although working conditions play a primary role in causing job stress, the role of individual factors cannot be ignored, NIOSH says. In other words, two employees doing virtually the same retail work may respond very differently. One may be able to handle the job-related stress. But the other employee—particularly if that person is having marital problems, is having difficulty finding day care for his or her child, or is unable to pay his or her bills—may not be able to handle the additional work-related stress.

NIOSH suggests you take these three steps to help prevent job-related employee stress:

### **STEP 1: Identify the problem**

Low employee morale, health and job complaints, and high turnover are often the first signs of job stress. But in today's fragile economy, workers fearful of losing their jobs are unlikely to complain.

It's important to find a way to collect information from managers, supervisors, and other employees so you can determine the causes and the extent of job-related stress. You might hold group discussions with employees or design an employee survey that includes questions on perceptions of work conditions, stress, health, and job satisfaction. If you are uncertain how to design a survey that will collect measurable data—or how to analyze the resulting data—an outside consultant or your local college or university's psychology department should be able to provide assistance.

As you are working to identify the problem, be sure that you and your other managers have the skills needed to approach an employee who is showing signs of stress. Being a good listener is step one. Then provide the person with internal and/or external assistance. Know what resources are available in your community, such as county or local mental health agencies, community organizations that provide assistance with financial problems, local clinics (particularly free clinics or those with sliding fee scales), toll-free crisis hotlines, and organizations geared toward women's issues (such as battered women hotlines). Post the phone numbers of these agencies and hotlines in employee break rooms, employee restrooms, and other areas where your workers will see them.

An employee assistance program (EAP) can also be another good resource. Be aware, however, that some employees may be hesitant to use it due to embarrassment or fear that their personal information will get out to co-workers or to their boss.

### **STEP 2: Design and implement interventions**

The interventions you choose will depend on the information you collect in identifying the problem. If you hold group discussions with employees, be sure to ask them for their ideas on how to resolve the issues. You may want to appoint a small team, comprising management and employee representatives, to determine the most appropriate interventions. Also, you may have learned that interventions are only needed in certain areas of your operation—or that they vary among departments.

If you surveyed your employees, be sure to give them feedback on what was found and what actions are being considered to remedy or address the problems.

#### **Additional interventions to consider include:**

- **Offer an occupational stress workshop.** Ask local agencies in your community for suggestions on trained persons who could lead this. Be sure the workshop includes discussion of steps both employees and management can take to reduce job-related stress.
- **Set up an ongoing occupational stress committee.** Again, this committee should have representation from both management and employees. It's important that the committee not become a vehicle for employee complaints. Instead, it

## **How to Change the Organization to Prevent Job Stress**

Ensure that the workload is in line with workers' capabilities and resources.

- ✓ Design jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills.
- ✓ Clearly define workers' roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ Give workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs.
- ✓ Improve communications. Reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for social interaction among workers.
- ✓ Establish work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job.

(Source: *STRESS... At Work*, NIOSH, reprinted from *American Psychologist*)

should focus on solutions your organization can put in place based on the data collected in identifying the problem.

Other ideas you can implement, depending on the sources of the job stress, include increasing the skill levels of employees through training or other means, providing cross-training to give employees a chance to rotate between jobs, improving physical work conditions, offering flex time or other types of work schedules, and providing career development training and a formal career ladder for employees hoping to move into higher positions.

**STEP 3: Evaluate the interventions**

NIOSH suggests that you establish specific timetables for evaluating the

effectiveness of your various interventions and that you evaluate them over the short term (for example, on a quarterly basis) and the long term (annually).

Long-term evaluations should focus on such objective data as employee turnover rates, absenteeism, and injury/illness rates. More immediate improvements may be evident in the quality of interactions with customers and co-workers as well as fewer incidents of signs of stress. Know that as conditions change—employees leave, new employees come on board, and/or the overall economic climate changes—the sources of job-related stress and preventive solutions may also change. That's one of the reasons it's important to take a long-term approach to this issue. And again, if you are not sure how to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of your interventions, an outside consultant or other outside resource can provide assistance.

Barbara Mulhern is a freelance writer who specializes in occupational safety and health issues. Vern Putz Anderson, PhD, CPE, is a public health advisor at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.





M A N U F A C T U R I N G

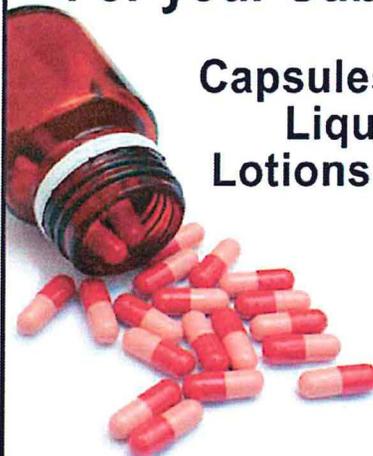




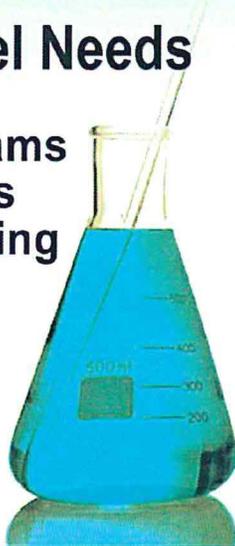




## For your Sub-Contract and Private Label Needs



**Capsules • Tablets • Powders • Creams**  
**Liquid Vitamins • Pet Supplements**  
**Lotions • Haircare • Laboratory Testing**



**Your source for  
Natural & Organic Products**  
 CGNP "Health as Nature Intended"

Please Contact Sales For More Information  
**661.877.4280** or **info@cgnp.net**

www.cgnp.net

cGMP and OTC Manufacturer of Nutraceutical and Cosmeceutical Products

Nov./Dec. 2009

# RetailMerchandiser

retail-merchandiser.com STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH

Visit our other sites

Sears

Kmart

LANDS END

craftsman

the great indoors

Outlet

PartsDirect



Welcome reader@retail-merchandiser.com. Logout

Sears Credit Cards Find a Store Order Status Customer Service My Profile

Recently Viewed Cart

Shop Departments

MySears Community | Shopping Helpers | E-mail Signup | Weekly Ad | Catalog | Gift Ideas | Gift Cards | Gift Registry | Español

What are you shopping for?

All Products

GO

Need it Now? Buy online. Pick up in store.

# Leading the Charge

While other retailers panicked about how to handle the holiday season, Sears Holdings got focused and boosted its online presence.



Back to Top

Sears Community

Customer Service

About Sears

Sears Websites

Worry Free Shopping

# CONTENTS

## UPFRONT

6 News and Notes

8 PLMA Wrap

Innovation Way: An up-tick in attendance and new ways for retailers and manufacturers to show their wares made this year's Private Label Trade Show one of the most successful yet.

9 Upcoming

10 The Look: J&R Electronics



## 16 COVER STORY

**Leading the Charge:** In the midst of an industry panic about how to handle the holiday season, Sears Holdings got focused and positioned itself as an e-commerce leader.



12



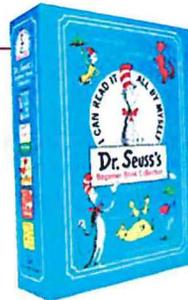
## FEATURES

12 BEST PRACTICES **Gadget Bait** Why the consumer electronics category draws shoppers and how retailers can capitalize on the attraction.

20 SAGE ADVICE **Don't Blow Your Top** Industry experts outline what steps to take to ensure job-related stresses don't batter your bottom line.

## NEW & NOTABLE

Noteworthy products in all categories.



182

# The Real Value

As retailers wait to see whether or not consumers will shop this holiday season, many are looking for the genius value proposition that will make customers step in the door instead of walking on by. For a few retailers, that proposition is all about age.

Borders Group developed a teen-focused department, Borders Ink, earlier this year. The department will stock graphic novels, fantasy, and young-adult titles and will leave room for music and DVDs.

In a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, Borders vice president of merchandising/trade books, Kathryn Popoff, said, "We want this [department] to be about more than just the book," a notion that shows Borders understands the multimedia appeal of a generation that can't remember a time when the Internet wasn't around.

On the other end of the spectrum, a program run by Kimberly-Clark and used by retailers like Walgreen, Rite Aid, and Family Dollar Stores gives executives insight into the challenges facing elderly shoppers.

In a September article in *WSJ*, Todd Fang, a Walgreen vice president, said he put on glasses that blurred his vision, put raw popcorn kernels in his shoes, and taped his thumbs to his palms. "I can't imagine how this would feel if the store were crowded," he said of the experience.

The push to see stores through senior eyes is an effort to cater to baby boomers, who will start turning 65 in 2011 and are expected to spend \$50 billion over the next decade on consumer products in the US. (Estimated by Sean Seitzinger, SVP of consulting and innovation for market-research firm Information Resources.)

If your company has so far stuck to discounts and selection as a way to enhance value, it may be time to take a step outside of the box—try using it as a stepstool to elevate your business to the next level.



Amanda Gaines  
Editor-in-Chief

## RetailMerchandiser

STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH

**PUBLISHER**  
mkelly@retail-merchandiser.com Mike Kelly  
(978) 232-9494

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
againes@redcoatpublishing.com Amanda Gaines  
(978) 299-3470

**PUBLISHING DIRECTOR**  
jmillier@retail-merchandiser.com Joe Miller  
(978) 299-3438

**EDITORS**  
Meghan Flynn Ashley McGown  
Jill Rose Adam Swift  
Eric Slack

### DESIGN

**CREATIVE DIRECTOR**  
cbarney@redcoatpublishing.com Caroline Barney  
(978) 299-3439

**DESIGNERS**  
Amy Stewart  
Eland Wyatt

### EDITORIAL RESEARCH

**SR. V.P. EDITORIAL RESEARCH**  
rnelson@redcoatpublishing.com Rick Nelson  
(978) 299-3456

**V.P. EDITORIAL RESEARCH**  
joy@redcoatpublishing.com Joy Francesconi  
(978) 299-3499

**EDITORIAL RESEARCHERS**  
Jonathan Houston Manager  
jhouston@redcoatpublishing.com (978) 299-3487  
Amar Alhakim  
aalhakim@redcoatpublishing.com (978) 299-3424  
Amy Ingoldsby  
aingoldsby@redcoatpublishing.com (978) 299-3412  
Jillian Walsh  
jwalsh@redcoatpublishing.com (978) 299-3461

### PROJECT COORDINATORS

Keven Dunn Melissa Dolen  
Davies Millett Ed Lannon  
Rocky Plsa Stephen Pastorello  
Joel White Amber Russo  
Steve Wilbert

### INTERNET

**WEB SITE MANAGER**  
ktanner@schofield-media.com Keath Tanner  
(312) 236-4090 x2216

### PRODUCTION/CIRCULATION

**TRAFFIC COORDINATORS**  
Catherine Tersigni  
ctersigni@redcoatpublishing.com (978) 299-3421  
Melizza Santram-Chernov  
mchernov@redcoatpublishing.com (978) 299-3441

**RedCoat Publishing**  
900 Cummings Center, Suite 222-T  
Beverly, MA 01915

November/December, Volume 49, No. 6 (USPS 157-700; ISSN 1530-8154; MID#900000031) is published bi-monthly by RedCoat Publishing. Printed in USA. Periodicals Postage paid at Beverly, MA and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 2009 by RedCoat Publishing. All rights reserved. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 41089016. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: DPGM, 7496 Bath Road, Unit 2, Mississauga, ON L4T 1L2. Postmaster: Please forward address changes or deletions to Retail Merchandiser, 200 E. Randolph Street, 70th Floor, Chicago, IL 60601.