



Genius File #8 – The Negative Effects of Old Management Beliefs

By

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In previous Genius Files ([go here for archived articles www.whatsyourgenius.com](http://www.whatsyourgenius.com)) I've talked a lot about the negative effects of a workplace filled with outdated beliefs about how best to manage people. My argument has been that a great deal of these beliefs are legacies left over from the industrial era, where most people were manual workers, not the knowledge workers we find occupying most offices today.

There is a whole host of problems associated with such outdated management beliefs, the most immediate being decreased performance and job satisfaction. The more disconcerting part of being mismanaged like this, however, is what it does to the individual beyond just limiting performance.

The stress caused by these workplaces starts with a lack of performance and on top of that you can add: self-doubt, job insecurity, uncertainty, lack of faith in leadership and reduced passion and enjoyment for the work.

Overall, being mismanaged is stressful, and I don't mean healthy stress (eustress). I mean harmful stress (distress). And when you look at what modern medicine is just now learning about the impact of stress on the human body (let alone psyche), the effects are startling.

According to Dr. Leon Pomeroy, the founding President of the International Academy of Preventive Medicine, "psychological and emotional stress can gravely affect the human body in many negative ways. Stress triggers an overdose of hormones like epinephrine and Cortisol that, over time, can become toxic to the human body. Chronic stress negatively affects your body's ability to

regulate its own processes (homeostasis). Your ability to absorb nutrients, lose weight and even fight off infections are negatively affected. Even the chemistry of sleep is disrupted by chronic stress, and sleep deprivation itself only aggravates the symptoms even more.”

Some common side effects of chronic stress on the physical body are:

- The immune system: Under stress, the body becomes more vulnerable to illnesses, from colds and minor infections to major diseases. If you have a chronic illness stress can make the symptoms even worse
- Cardiovascular disease: Stress is linked to high blood pressure, abnormal heartbeat (arrhythmia), problems with blood clotting, and hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis). It is also linked to coronary artery disease, heart attack, and heart failure
- Muscle pain: People who are stressed often have neck, shoulder, and low back pain. This may be caused by constant tension in the muscle because of stress. Stress also affects rheumatoid arthritis
- Stomach and intestinal problems: Recent research indicates that stress plays a significant role in gastro esophageal reflux disease (GERD), peptic ulcer disease, and irritable bowel syndrome

In addition to the negative physiological impact chronic stress can adversely affect your thoughts and decisions as well. Psychological signs and symptoms usually associated with stress can be:

- Increased irritability or sensitivity to minor disturbances
- Feeling jumpy or exhausted all the time
- Difficulty concentrating
- Worrying about insignificant things
- Frustration and a feeling of something being wrong somewhere, but not sure where

According to Elissa Epel, PhD and an assistant professor in the department of psychiatry at the University of California at San Francisco, “The problem lies within our neuroendocrine system -- a brain-to-body connection that harkens back to evolutionary times and which helped our distant ancestors to survive. Though today the sources of stress are more likely to be an unpaid bill than a saber-toothed tiger, this system still activates a series of hormones whenever we feel stressed. These hormones give us the biochemical strength we need to fight or flee our stressors. While this system works fine when our stress comes in the form of physical danger - when we really need to ‘fight or flee’, and then replenish - it doesn't serve the same purpose for today's garden-variety stressors.”

According to Shawn Talbott, PhD, an associate professor in the Department of Nutrition at the University of Utah, our response to stress today doesn't involve burning any of these extra hormones that we create in anticipation of having to fight or flee. These extra hormones are created but not used up and this build up adds to the detrimental effects of chronic stress.

The more mismanaged you are, the more frustrated you get with your results, the less fulfilled you feel in your work, and the less success you achieve – the

more stress you will suffer. And that's bad news for your physical and psychological health and wellbeing.

I once worked with one of our consultants to help a client of hers whose corporate world-headquarters were in Manhattan. This company was suffering from a stressful work environment on a systemic level. They had moral issues, health and wellness problems, increased sickness and absenteeism, and a whole host of performance issues caused in large part by the level of stress in their office.

It was so significant that one day an Executive Vice President told us that, "on average, an ambulance pulls up in front of our building 350 times a year." Now I'm sure there are a fair number of accidental staples to be removed from fingers, and twisted ankles on stairwells and other reasons for an ambulance to show up at an office with thousands of employees, but 350 times a year?

Unfortunately too large a majority of these visits were for people with chest pain, who had passed out or were feeling so sick they felt they needed an ambulance. This was a workplace filled with way too much stress.

To say that people are physically damaging themselves - even dying - from stress is *not* hyperbole, and outdated management beliefs are a major contributor to this concern.

It's time for new management principles, and new ways of valuing people where their individuality is appreciated instead of suppressed. It's time for new thinking about what constitutes a healthy workplace and it's time to challenge conventional thinking that acts more like a hitching post than a guidepost.

Even if only for purely profit-driven reasons - because healthier, happier employees far outperform unhealthy, unhappy ones across the board - it's time to reconsider how we approach people.

We need to better understand them, better motivate them, align their natural talents better with what they do and how they do it, and incorporate this higher level of understanding into how they are hired, managed and developed as well.

As weird as it sounds, in some ways it is time to start treating people like we treat machines. Perhaps not "treat" them like machines, but "understand" them like we do machines at least.

We have become very adept at understanding the machines that were so central to success in the industrial age (e.g., how they work, how they don't work, what they need to perform optimally, how to prevent them from breaking down, etc.)

Those who will excel in the new intellectual era had better learn how their most important asset works every bit as well as they knew how their old vital assets worked. And that doesn't mean saying, "We have an HR person for that."

The Genius Files is a series of educational articles crafted from lessons learned in the recently concluded Genius Project (a seven-year, 197,000, twenty-three country study of what drives individual excellence in the new knowledge worker economy).

The Genius Project is the foundational research behind the latest book from Innermetrix Inc Founder and CEO Jay Niblick titled, *What's Your Genius – How the Best Think for Success*.

To view the entire Genius series, or to learn more about how you can unleash your own genius, please visit [**http://www.whatsyourgenius.com**](http://www.whatsyourgenius.com).