



## Holiday Stress - Organizational Response

During the Holiday season, we hear a lot about holiday stress and strategies for individuals to manage this stress. As employees struggle to manage the additional stress, organizations and productivity are impacted. As employee attention, focus and energy shifts to holiday shopping, holiday preparations and family dynamics, workplace productivity is impacted. This time of year is an especially busy one in some industries and the Holiday season shortens some workplace deadlines. Thus the lack of focus can have significant impact in the workplace.

What can organizations do to support employees and maintain productivity? Flexible scheduling is the primary accommodation that employees indicate would help reduce stress. An Accenture study found:

- 54% of employees indicated that flexible scheduling would help reduce stress
- 26% said occasional telecommuting would reduce stress
- 37% valued the opportunity to use PTO during the holiday season

Time and flexibility are crucial in helping employees manage the additional stressors during the Holiday season. It is incumbent upon managers to continue to manage their employees and maintain productivity throughout the holiday season. It is not the time to “just let things go” because of the season. Managers can work closely with their employees to provide flexibility and continue to hold employees accountable for performance goals. Having the difficult conversations rather than avoiding them creates a win-win for the organization and the employee.

Organizations can also be thoughtful about workplace Holiday activities and events. Many workplaces plan parties and gift exchanges as ways to celebrate the season and foster employee engagement. In this economy, it is especially important to minimize activities that require employees to spend additional money on workplace gifts or party dress for special occasions. The financial strain that is typically evident during the Holidays is exacerbated by the continuing economic crisis. When planning Holiday parties, closely evaluate the role that alcohol plays in the celebration. Some companies have chosen to eliminate alcohol for legal and social reasons. Invariably, one or more coworkers drink too much and behave in ways that are detrimental to their career and contributes to workplace conflict. An open bar sends a message and creates difficulties.

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The Holiday season is a time when family dynamics take center stage and employees often unknowingly replicate their family dynamics in the workplace. In addition, depression increases during the Holiday season and in the dark winter months. Managers, more than ever need to continue to manage, stay connected with their employees and be observant for sign that employees may be experiencing personal difficulties related to stress and depression. Managers can use the EAP for consultation regarding employee performance and behavioral concerns. Keep the EAP publicity materials visible to employees and remind employees about the resources provided through confidential EAP services.

Managers can best help their employees and the organization manage holiday stress by managing themselves. Take the time to look at your own stress levels, expectations, family dynamics, organizational stressors and Holiday stress. Use the EAP to help you manage yourself and demonstrate positive and proactive coping skills.

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