

## Calm and productive

**Level:** Intermediate upwards

**Timing:** 90 minutes plus

**Material needed:** One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student; one copy of the interview per student (optional).

**Group size:** Any

### Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an adapted article from *Business Spotlight* Issue 2/2013. The article is about work-related stress; it discusses what stress is, how it manifests itself, what consequences it has and how it can be relieved.

The tasks in the worksheets encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language, and also to practise useful business skills such as asking and answering questions.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

### Lead-in

These questions are meant to introduce the topic of work-related stress and to get the students thinking about how this might manifest itself, e.g. how somebody might act, how it might affect their work, how their personality might (temporarily) change, etc. The question asks about co-workers so that the students don't have to reveal too much personal information. However, they can relate the answers to themselves if they are comfortable in doing so.

### Key words

Students match the key words with their definitions then look for those key words in the article to read them in context. In doing this, they will get an idea of what the article is about. The words are divided into two sets, which correspond roughly to the first and second half of the article. You could make this task more communicative by dividing the words up between pairs of groups of students who should then share their answers with each other. The definitions are given in the order that the words appear in the article.

### Key:

1. lay-off (para 1); 2. pedestrian (para 2); 3. environment (para 3); 4. stuff (para 3); 5. locate (para 3); 6. workload (para 4); 7. let-up (para 4); 8. exhausted (para 5); 9. performance (para 5); 10. antidote (para 6); 11. accomplishments (para 6); 12. contagious (para 7); 13. side effect (para 9); 14. effective (para 10); 15. self-diagnosis (para 10); 16. violate (para 11); 17. meaning (para 12); 18. consequence (para 12); 19. expectations (para 13); 20. disappointed (para 13)

### Causes, symptoms and treatment

Students look back at the article and complete the chart with as much information as they can find. They may need to change the wording before they write it into the table. Once they have done this, encourage them to add any further suggestions and ideas of their own.

### Key (suggested):

causes	symptoms	treatment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new technologies</li> <li>• the speed at which change happens</li> <li>• extra work due to other employees being laid off</li> <li>• not feeling like you can take time away from your desk</li> <li>• being pushed too hard</li> <li>• causing delays and making mistakes (see 'symptoms')</li> <li>• the worry of trying to remember everything</li> <li>• spending eight hours a day in front of a computer screen</li> <li>• being unable to meet high expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exhaustion</li> <li>• poor work performance</li> <li>• lower productivity</li> <li>• causing delay and making mistakes (see 'causes')</li> <li>• headaches</li> <li>• eye strain, eye pain, blurry vision</li> <li>• stomach problems</li> <li>• tiredness</li> <li>• tinnitus</li> <li>• pain in your back / head / neck</li> <li>• disappointment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• move around</li> <li>• take a short break</li> <li>• have a walk</li> <li>• use the stairs (not the elevators)</li> <li>• sit in natural light</li> <li>• request that work printers are placed in a central location</li> <li>• get some fresh air</li> <li>• exercise</li> <li>• eat lunch outside</li> <li>• recharge at midday (by doing the above)</li> <li>• be well organized</li> <li>• do one thing at a time</li> <li>• finish one thing before you start the next</li> <li>• list your tasks and tick (check) them off when they are done</li> <li>• think positively about your work</li> <li>• avoid co-workers who are negative</li> <li>• deep breathing / massage</li> <li>• blink your eyes, look away from the computer screen</li> <li>• try relaxation techniques, e.g. palming, sit quietly, breathe, close your eyes</li> <li>• improve your posture</li> <li>• stretch your muscles</li> <li>• tighten and relax your muscles</li> <li>• have a good laugh</li> <li>• think about what your job means to you</li> <li>• don't expect your job to fulfil all your expectations</li> </ul>

## Calm and productive

### Teaching and learning strategy: Using colours and dividing up the task

Tasks such as the *Key words* task and *Causes, symptoms and treatments* task can at first glance seem rather daunting to some students. Getting students to work together in small groups and dividing up the task between the individuals in each group will make the task not only easier to deal with but also more communicative, as they will have to tell each other their answers. It also won't take up as much valuable classroom time.

Many students may not have used highlighters and coloured pens since they were at school. Others will use them regularly. A task such as the *Causes, symptoms and treatments* task can be made much easier and clearer if you change or develop the instructions for example, by asking students to highlight or underline all the causes of stress in red, highlight or underline all the symptoms of stress in orange, and highlight or underline all the suggested treatments of stress in green.

### Multi-word expressions

This second vocabulary task looks at multi-word expressions that were used in the article. The task is divided into two parts. In part *a* the students find the expressions that most closely relate to the clues given. Part *b* encourages them to use some of the expressions in a personalization exercise in which they put them into sentences that are relevant to their own country or company. **Note:** *al-desko* is a play on words – it is the opposite of *al fresco* (the act of eating outside).

#### Key:

1. *pace of change* (para 1); 2. *al desko* (para 4); 3. *one thing at a time* (para 6); 4. *sense of accomplishment* (para 6); 5. *pat yourself on the back* (para 8)

### Sources

The students are asked to find and name the sources quoted in the article. Once they have noticed that all the sources originate from the US, ask them to find articles, websites, etc. that deal with work-related stress in their country. You might want to discuss whether stress at work is an American problem or a worldwide one.

#### Key:

1. *USA Today, CNN Money, The Wall Street Journal*

2. *American Institute of Architects, Perkins+Will* (international architectural firm); *Right Management* (an international recruiting firm), *The Energy Project* (a New York consultancy), *SteadyHealth.com*, *HelpGuide website*, *The Perfect Workday Company*, *Lockheed Martin* (a systems integration organization), *University of Denver*

**Extension:** Ask students research the websites listed at the end of the article to find further advice on how to deal with stress.

### Discussion

These questions give the students the chance to think about what they have read and share their own opinions. It might be beneficial, particularly for lower-level groups, to allow students five minutes to think about how they might answer the questions and make notes in preparation for the discussion.

### Further reading

Students who would like to continue reading about and discussing this topic can read this interview with a stress-relief expert for further information and tips on how to make the workplace a more relaxed environment.

### Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

### Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: Fighting back  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/fighting-back/552062.article>

Business Spotlight: Emotional roller coaster  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/emotional-roller-coaster/550434.article>

Business Spotlight: Problems and difficulties  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-tasks/problems-and-difficulties/>

## Calm and productive

### 1 Lead-in

How would you know if one of your co-workers was suffering from work-related stress? What symptoms would you expect to see?

### 2 Key words

Write the key words and expressions from the article next to their definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

#### paragraphs 1- 6

1. a situation in which an employer ends a worker's employment, especially temporarily, because there is not enough work for them \_\_\_\_\_
2. someone who is walking, especially in a town or city, instead of driving \_\_\_\_\_
3. the place in which people live and work, including all the physical conditions that affect them \_\_\_\_\_
4. a variety of objects or things \_\_\_\_\_
5. place, put or situate \_\_\_\_\_
6. the amount of work that a person or organization has to do \_\_\_\_\_
7. a pause or reduction in something unpleasant \_\_\_\_\_
8. extremely tired and without enough energy to do anything else \_\_\_\_\_
9. the process of doing a job or task \_\_\_\_\_
10. something that helps to improve the effects of something bad or negative \_\_\_\_\_

#### paragraphs 7 - 13

11. this describes how a feeling or mood spreads quickly from one person to another \_\_\_\_\_
12. a difficult thing that you succeed in doing, especially after working hard over a period of time \_\_\_\_\_
13. any additional result that you did not expect or want \_\_\_\_\_
14. used to describe something that works well and produces the result that was intended \_\_\_\_\_
15. the process of deciding what is wrong with you \_\_\_\_\_
16. to do something that is in opposition to a rule, agreement, policy, etc. \_\_\_\_\_
17. the special importance or purpose of something \_\_\_\_\_
18. a result or effect of something \_\_\_\_\_
19. a belief that something should happen in a particular way or that something should have particular qualities \_\_\_\_\_
20. unhappy because something that you hoped for did not happen or because something was not as good as you expected \_\_\_\_\_

## Calm and productive

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by Margaret Davis

People who suffer from stress, perform poorly at work. But how does stress manifest itself, what are the reasons for it and how can we deal with it? Margaret Davis gives an overview and speaks to an expert.



1 These days, everyone seems to be talking about stress at work. That's not surprising: new technologies are increasing the pace of change and, in many professions, lay-offs have brought extra work to the employees who have kept their jobs. Still, stress is not always a negative thing, and there are methods of dealing with it that anyone can learn.

2 Experts say that one of the best ways to fight stress is simply to move around. This is one area in which European workers have important advantages. Unlike cities in North America, European communities are built for pedestrians. So if you want to take a short break from work, you will probably have no trouble finding a place to walk.

3 "There is a direct relation between the built environment and people's lifestyles," says Rick Bell of the American Institute of Architects. Bell and other American architects are supporters of the active-design movement, which involves creating buildings that encourage healthy habits. "It makes [workers] feel valued and a lot of this stuff doesn't really cost anything because it's where you locate things," Joan Blumenfeld, of the international architectural firm Perkins+Will, told *USA Today*. Principles behind active design include building stairs rather than elevators, making use of natural light, moving printers from individual desks and placing them in central locations so that people have to get up from their desks, and building outdoor spaces such as roof gardens that encourage workers to leave their desks and get a bit of fresh air and exercise.

4 While you're outside, why not have lunch? A recent study showed that only 21 percent of Americans regularly leave their desks to have lunch. Instead, most hurriedly eat "al desko" while continuing to stare at their computer screens. "Far fewer employees are feeling comfortable enough with their workloads to take time away," says Michael Haid, senior vice president of

Right Management, the international recruiting firm that did the study. "One has to ask if such pressure, without any let-up, actually benefits the individual or the organization," Haid told CNN Money. "We are definitely not talking about a return to the days of the three-martini lunch, but have we gone too far in the other direction?"

5 Tony Schwartz, CEO of The Energy Project, a New York City consultancy, says there is "a clear link between exhausted employees and poor performance." Schwartz adds: "By pushing people too hard, you actually make them less productive. Letting employees recharge at midday is a tremendous competitive advantage. Look at Google. Everyone goes to lunch there. The food is great, and it's free. And people are having terrific conversations in the dining room. Facebook and Twitter now offer the same thing, that chance to connect with colleagues and share ideas over a relaxing meal."

6 Even if your company doesn't provide you with a free lunch, you can make your working day more relaxed by being well organized, says Dr. Shelley Narula. This helps you "avoid delays and mistakes, which often bring additional stress," Narula writes on *SteadyHealth.com*. "Doing one thing at a time and finishing it before taking up another ... is an equally good antidote against work-related stress." She advises the low-tech method of listing your tasks in an appointment book. "Putting these tasks on paper also eliminates the worry that often comes with trying to remember all these details. And it also makes you feel a great sense of accomplishment checking off a finished task."

## Calm and productive

7 Have you ever worked with someone who always looked on the dark side of life? Don't be that person yourself, advises Dr. Jeanne Segal. "Your emotions are contagious, and stress has an impact on the quality of your interactions with others. The better you are at managing your own stress, the more you'll positively affect those around you, and the less other people's stress will negatively affect you," says Segal, who runs the HelpGuide website with Melinda Smith, Lawrence Robinson, and her husband, Robert Segal.

8 "Try to think positively about your work, avoid negative-thinking co-workers, and pat yourself on the back about small accomplishments, even if no one else does," she comments.

9 Many people react to stress with headaches, eye strain, or stomach problems. If you're one of them, try deep breathing or massage. Paying for a professional massage could be money well spent, since you can learn techniques that you can later use for self-massage. Eye strain and tiredness are a common side effect of spending eight hours a day staring at a computer screen. If you're having serious eye problems (blurry vision, eye pain, or headaches), you should go to a doctor. Self-help includes frequently blinking to prevent dry eyes, changing focus (look off into the distance at regular intervals), and taking regular breaks (spend five minutes of every hour away from the screen).

10 An effective relaxation technique for the eyes is palming: rub the palms of your hands together to warm them, then place them lightly over your closed eyes. Sit with your elbows on your desk, placing your head in your hands. Breathe slowly and deeply for about 15 seconds. Repeat this exercise whenever your eyes feel tired. Tinnitus, that ringing or buzzing sound in your ears, is often caused by stress, and can be reduced through relaxation techniques. After every hour that you work, try 30 seconds of deep breathing or sitting quietly with your eyes closed. Of course, as with any potentially serious physical symptom, you should see a doctor before attempting selfdiagnosis or treatment. And what about that pain in your neck / back / head? Good posture – standing and sitting straight with your feet flat on the floor – can reduce pain and help strengthen the abdomen and lower back. Simple stretches often help muscles to relax. So does tightening and then releasing muscles.

11 There's nothing like a good laugh to take some of the pressure off. Mike Collins, president of The Perfect Workday Company, keeps jokes and amusing books in his office. When he needs to relax, he looks at the jokes or picks up a book and reads until he starts to laugh. YouTube could fulfill a similar function, as could watching online versions of your favourite comedy show, but be careful not to violate company policy on internet use.

12 Experts say that a good way to deal with stress is to think about what your job really means, and to remind yourself why you chose your profession. Rick Best, a health-services scientist for Lockheed Martin, has studied the stress levels of nurses who work with war veterans. "The meaning they got from their job was high," Best told *The Wall Street Journal*. "They went into the profession of nursing to help people. As a consequence, they derived much meaning from what they were doing, and they were better able to handle stress."

13 But not every job is rewarding, so don't expect yours to provide emotional as well as financial satisfaction. "With so many expectations, it's no wonder that work can't meet all of that," says Ken Pinnock, associate director of employee relations and services at the University of Denver. "So we get disappointed, but I don't know whether work could fulfil all those things."

### For more information

- Mike Collins has an amusing blog with tips for common workplace situations: <http://perfectworkday.blogspot.de>
- The HelpGuide provides useful information on mental health: [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)
- Relax Intuit is stress expert Susie Mantell's Web site: [www.relaxintuit.com](http://www.relaxintuit.com)



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## Calm and productive

### 3 Causes, symptoms and treatment

Highlight all the *causes* and *symptoms* of stress mentioned in the article as well as the suggested *treatments*. Write them into the box in the relevant columns.

causes	symptoms	treatment

## Calm and productive

### 4 Multi-word expressions

a. Find the following expressions in the article:

1. the speed at which new things happen (para 1)
2. eating (lunch) at your desk (para 4)
3. not doing everything together (para 6)
4. the good feeling you get when you have achieved something (para 6)
5. tell yourself that you have done a good job (para 8)

b. Use them in example sentences of your own.

### 5 Sources

Answer the questions below in small groups.

1. Which three newspapers and news websites are quoted in the article?
2. Which other types of businesses or institutes are mentioned as sources?
3. The sources are all from one part of the world. Can you find any similar information about stress at work that relates particularly to your country?

### 6 Discussion

Discuss the questions below.

- Is work-related stress something new, or has it always been around?
- Is it easier to talk about work-related stress now than it was in the past?
- What factors might alter or dictate the way you talk about work-related stress?
- Why are some people more likely to complain about work-related stress than others?
- Are the reasons for work-related stress mostly intrinsic (coming from within a person) or extrinsic (coming from outside pressure and demands)?

## Calm and productive

### 7 Extra reading

Read the interview with a stress-relief expert for further information and tips on how to make your workplace a more relaxed environment.

**“You can spend a career focused on what was or wasn’t – or on what can be”**



Award-winning stress-relief expert **SUSIE MANTELL** is the best-selling author of *Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace*, a guided meditation CD for deep relaxation. Mantell develops programs for Fortune 500 companies, distinguished hospitals and world-class spas. She provides free stress tips at [www.relaxintuit.com](http://www.relaxintuit.com).

#### How important is attitude (glass half full/glass half empty) for dealing with workplace stress?

How we perceive and respond to any event determines its stress value for us. Stress is often about choices, even when it doesn't feel that way. Attitude and perspective are always choices. Our reaction to workplace stress has an effect on job satisfaction and performance, as well as on our health, relationships and quality of life.

Interestingly, not all stress is harmful. Work-related stress can drive us toward creative problem-solving or inventive design. Remember the thrill of closing your first deal? ‘Constructive’ stress shows us what needs repair, when to scratch, or marry – or not.

Mother Nature hardwires us with a clever stress-response system, including reserves for true emergencies. When we sound the alarm excessively, the body-mind becomes ‘stressed’ beyond capacity. We’re more likely to suffer from illness, depression, irritability, forgetfulness, and carelessness. A lifetime is filled with possibilities, opportunities, challenges, risks and the choices we make when presented with each. We can spend a career focused on what was or wasn’t – or on what can be. Each day, we either grow toward the light or wither on the vine, and that too is a choice.

#### Is workplace negativism contagious? If so, what can you do to stop or prevent it?

The bottom line of any business is directly related to employees’ physical and emotional well-being. Wherever we focus our energy tends to flourish, and negativity is 100% self-inflicted stress. External stress triggers are learned. Co-workers’ reactions to stress can strongly influence our own. If we’re not mindful, we can get involved in gossip or complaining.

If co-workers speak negatively, here are five tips for rediscovering simple pleasures at work:

- 1. Ask yourself: “Will this matter in six months?”** React accordingly. Calmly walk to another room. Breathe. Stretch. Simple movement can shift our entire mood.
- 2. Over the speaker’s head, visualize an airplane with an advertising banner.** Imagine each negative word attaching to the banner as the plane flies by. Think: “They’re just words. They’ll be gone in a minute.”
- 3. Keep reminders in your workspace of who you are when you’re not there** (for example, a ticket from a concert, family photos, a golf ball).
- 4. Get outdoors, even if it’s only for ten minutes.** Do mini-meditations and mindful breathing – focusing your full attention on rhythmic inhalation and exhalation – while downloading emails or waiting at the bank.
- 5. Do something kind for a different co-worker every day.** Even a friendly smile can release your colleague’s stress reduction endorphins – and ours!

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