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As schools and students prepare for the upcoming summer holidays, rest and recuperation may be the last thing on your employees' minds. The difficult economic times of the past few years have led to leaner workforces and people being under more pressure than ever before. For the second year in succession, stress has topped the list of reasons for workplace absence according to the Absence Management 2012 survey report from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and Simplyhealth.

Stress is the most common cause of long-term absence for all workers. It causes more long-term absences than physical conditions such as neck pain and repetitive strain injury among manual workers and acute illnesses such as cancer or heart attacks among office workers *(Manage Stress, Improve the Bottom Line. SHRM HR Magazine, Feb 2013. Vol. 58 No. 2).*

We know that stress is never going to go away. Indeed much of your workforce is likely to perform better under some level of stress. However helping employees manage stress is critical to minimize the negative impacts of stress in the workplace.

Consider the following ways of maintaining the health and well-being of your employees:

- Examine working practices to make sure they are as flexible and efficient as possible.

- Assess employee awareness of resources that may help manage or reduce stress levels (for example information on your wellness program, or EAP related resources). Stressed employees are unlikely to go hunting for such information so it should be highly visible to encourage participation.

- Review your leave policies. Are employees encouraged to take time off for rest and recuperation? Is there a financial incentive (perhaps unintended) for not taking leave entitlement?

- Does your organizational culture inhibit taking time off? Many employees feel they can't take time off, for a variety of reasons. A quick review of leave balances at the end of the year can indicate whether there may be a problem.

- Draw on some of the latest thinking about resilience and agility and find new ways to support employees who are feeling the strain.
  See http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/resilience.htm for a brief overview of the importance of resilience and tips on developing resilience at work.

- Above all, at a time when many people are still fearing for their jobs, managers need to make sure the organization has a culture where it is acceptable for employees to say if they are struggling to cope and simply can't do what is being asked of them.

These are just a few areas of consideration when it comes to maintaining the health and well-being of your employees. But by considering your work practices, culture and the resources on offer to employees, you can make a big difference to those who feel they're carrying a big burden.

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