



Move to cut stress levels of teachers

Mark Shields takes a closer look...

EDUCATION has pledged to halve the number of teachers suffering from stress in the next 18 months, after figures revealed that the number of sick days taken for mental health reasons have more than doubled in the past two years.

Focus groups involving about 100 teachers are due to be set up in the near future to see what can be done to ease the level of stress in the profession, the department says.

A Freedom of Information request published earlier this week found that last year, 948.2 sick days were taken by teachers due to anxiety, stress or depression - compared to 426.1 in 2014.

A Long History of Stress

Teachers have been up against it for as long as I can remember. In a previous life many years ago I used to visit schools to present at seminars to groups of teachers given them valuable information on their retirement planning ON BEHALF OF THE TPA. Even back then teachers appeared to me to be so busy they could barely spend the time to attend these valuable seminars that "would give them critical info on how to retire early", not even the prospect of early retirement could tear them away from their desks.

I picked up on the stress back then, over twenty years ago. Sweaty palms, shaky voices, blotchy skin, bags under the eyes, as professional as they were at trying to hide it even I managed to spot it back then, I wonder who else did.

Twenty years later I have a private practice with many teachers occupying my hypnosis and therapy couch on a rather to regular basis.

I have to say the teaching profession is deemed so precarious in the "coaching arena" courses and programmes have been specifically formulated and are dedicated in helping teachers over come stress and get the balance correct in their lives

With friends, relatives and clients all saying the same things and quoting the same reasons I wonder why life seems to have become so difficult within the teaching profession.

One thing I know to be true. They "the stressors, the problem causers, the hierarchy" they are never going to change. That being said all is not lost because although the stressors themselves cannot be controlled, the way the stress is managed by the individual can. Thank goodness I hear you sigh. Obviously I don't mean ignore them, or bury your head in the sand, but find ways to process your stress in a different way. There are other ways you can find happiness at work.

Mark Shields and Professor Paul Dolan partner for Workplace Happiness Project.

I recently had the pleasure of working with Professor Paul Dolan, a Professor in behavioural science at the London School of Economics, who just so happens to have recently written a number 1 best-selling book called happiness by design. He is acknowledged as one of the world's leading experts on happiness along with me of course (I wish).

Paul is known internationally as "professor happiness" and will shortly be bringing his theories and strategies on happiness to our screens with his new BBC TV show based upon " getting happy"

Working with Paul over a number of months I LEARNED huge amounts from him and found the simplest smallest of things, nudges he calls them, can make a massive difference to people facing stresses at work.

Here are a number of simple tips I learned from Paul whilst working together with him on our wellbeing at work program.

Some Simple Tips

- 1 Focus on what makes you happy – If you only focus on the things you enjoy you will think happy, feel happy and behave happy.
- 2 Understand your reality is whatever you pay attention to. Focus your attention on things that are positive, that give you Joy or appreciation. Remember you create and are responsible your own reality.
- 3 Ensure you have the focus and pay attention to things in life that give you the right balance between purpose and pleasure.
- 4 Understand your internal thought aren't you and disassociate yourself from what they are suggesting or telling you to do. Take control of your inner dialogue and don't take these thought to seriously. To many people spend too much time and wasted energy thinking about doing the thinking.
- 5 Ensure you are present living in the moment as much as possible, mindfulness is great for this. Learn to slow down and enjoy what makes you happy day to day, moment by moment.

Of course there are the usual suspects that experts always advise to manage your stress levels such as take more exercise, diet, reduce stimulants such as alcohol and coffee, go to bed earlier, keep your body hydrated, etc etc.

Each month to assist in our focus on helping teachers and written specifically for the Jersey Life magazine, I am going to feature different tips with a view to help channel island teachers combat stress.

For any teachers who would like to know more about this article please call Mark Shields direct on 01462 431112.

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