



Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress Uniformed Services University School of Medicine

LEADERSHIP STRESS MANAGEMENT

The magnitude of death and destruction in this event require special measures for leaders to deal with their own stress. Leadership is paramount in maintaining organized, efficient work for continuity of efforts and recovery. Remember that jurisdictional issues between offices will always be present and will not be easily resolved due to conflicts between tasks. One of the risks with a task of this magnitude is leaders being aware of their own levels of stress and taking appropriate measures before problems begin. In order to take care of others you must first take care of yourself.

It is difficult to predict the kinds of psychological problems that any individual leader will have, however, the following management plan can help minimize later difficulties:

- To reduce stress it is critical to lead by example.
- Establish a work-rest schedule for yourself and follow it.
- Get off your feet during breaks.
- Provide a rest area for yourself with fluids and food and protection from news media and onlookers.
- Provide a minimum of 4 hours of sleep during each 24 hour period.
- If possible, return home for food and sleep.
- Drink and eat on a regular schedule – take every opportunity to assure that you are hydrated.
- Drink BEFORE you are thirsty.
- Avoid all beverages containing alcohol.
- Avoid smoking.
- Caffeine is the only safe stimulant but do not forget that it can jangle nerves and dehydrate you.
- In a time of terrible demand, moderation is still a virtue.
- When you notice that others are stressed assume that you are stressed.
- Identify a trusted co-worker who can evaluate your level of effectiveness and consult with them on a daily basis.
- Provide a similar service to a co-worker who trusts you.
- Communicate clearly in an optimistic manner but be sure to identify mistakes clearly for yourself and others and correct them.
- Compliments can serve as powerful motivators and stress moderators.
- Assure the safety of your loved ones and if possible provide regular information to them concerning your safety.
- Provide leadership to your peers and subordinates by suggesting that they take care of themselves in the same way you are taking care of yourself.

- Help subordinates manage stress by providing them access and ancillary services such as family support centers, informal counseling, access to rest and replenishment and discouraging them from working continuously without rest.
- As a leader help subordinates understand their need for a work schedule that requires them to rest.
- Reassure subordinates that if they develop powerful emotions in response to the demands being put upon them, the experiencing of those emotions is not weakness and it is normal. Effectiveness is achieved by using powerful emotions and tolerating distress while still performing in an exemplary way.
- Achieving a worthwhile goal can help one manage the most difficult stressors. Knowing that the achievement of a goal was appreciated is one of the most powerful social supports. This can prevent immediate and long-term problems related to stress.
- Over-dedication can occur in a high stress environment such as this and is a risk factor for disability.