CHAPTER 14:  
PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to help people manage their work lives better by being more productive and managing stress.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

The first half of this chapter describes various approaches to improving personal productivity, whereas the second half deals with the nature of stress and how it can be managed.

I. IMPROVING PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY
Achieving personal productivity is more in vogue than ever. Personal productivity refers to how much resources, including time, you consume to achieve a certain level of output.

A. Dealing with Procrastination
The person who procrastinates delays action for no good reason. Procrastination lowers productivity and is often a profound, debilitating problem. Depending on the reason for procrastination, the following techniques may help deal with the problem.

1. Calculate the cost of procrastination.
2. Follow the WIFO principle, which stands for worst in, first out.
3. Break the task into manageable chunks.
4. Make a commitment to other people.
5. Remove some clutter from your mind.
7. Eliminate tangible rewards you are giving yourself for procrastinating.

B. Attitudes and Values That Enhance Personal Productivity
Developing good work habits and time-management practices is often a matter of developing the right attitudes toward your work and toward time.

1. Begin with a Mission and Goals. A mission, or general purpose, propels you toward being productive. Goals support the mission statement.

2. Play the Inner Game of Work. By removing inner obstacles such as self-criticism, you can dramatically improve your ability to focus, learn, and perform.

3. Work Smarter, Not Harder. People caught up in trying to accomplish a job
often wind up working hard, but not in an imaginative and well-planned way that leads to good results.

4. **Value Orderliness and Cleanliness.** Orderliness helps most people become more productive because they can better focus their mind. Also, less time is wasted hunting for things.

5. **Value Good Attendance and Punctuality.** Good attendance and punctuality are expected of both experienced and inexperienced employees. Being at work is obviously more productive than being not at work, with few exceptions. A large study showed that employees who are late also tended to have high absenteeism records.

6. **Attain a Balance in Life and Avoid Being a Workaholic.** Overwork can lead to negative stress and burnout. Proper physical rest and relaxation can contribute to mental alertness and improved ability to cope with frustration. Neglecting rest and relaxation can lead to **workaholism**, an addiction to work in which not working hard is an uncomfortable experience. However, note the achievement-oriented workaholic who thrives on work and is productive.

**B. Work Habits and Skills That Enhance Personal Productivity**

In addition to the right attitudes, effective work habits and skills are essential for high productivity.

1. **Prepare a To-Do List and Set Priorities.** At the heart of every time-management system is list making, wherever the lists are placed. Almost all successful people establish prioritized lists.

2. **Streamline Your Work and Emphasize Important Tasks.** Getting rid of unproductive work is necessary when understaffed, and is part of **reengineering**, in which work processes are radically redesigned and simplified. Look for duplication of effort and waste. Search to accomplish work activities that if done well would make a big difference in your job performance.

3. **Concentrate on One Important Task at a Time.** Intense concentration leads to crisper judgment and analysis and also minimizes major errors. However, multi-tasking for routine tasks can enhance productivity. However, watch out for rudeness and dangerous acts.

4. **Stay in Control of Paperwork and Electronic Work.** The effective career
person does not neglect paperwork, including electronic work. Sort and handle the papers in your in-basket and e-mail twice a day. Put papers in their proper location, not back in the basket.

5. **Work Productively from Your Home or Virtual Office.** A **virtual office** is a place of work without a fixed physical location from which the worker or workers communicate their output electronically. Many workers lack the self-discipline and effective work habits necessary to be productive outside a traditional office. Even if working at home, act as if you work in a traditional office.

6. **Enhance Your Internet Search Skills.** If your job requires conducting searches on the Internet, you will be more productive in you can conduct searches quickly. Use several search engines, and give careful thought to selecting the right search word or phrase.

C. **Overcoming Time Wasters.** Another basic thrust to improved personal productivity is to minimize wasting time. Whether or not an activity is a time waster depends on the purpose of the activity. Chatting with work associates could be wasting time, or it could be a method of informal learning and networking. Just being aware of time wasters is a starting point in wasting less time. Exhibit 14-1 presents a list of common time wasters.

II. UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING STRESS
A major challenge facing any worker who wants to stay healthy and have good interpersonal relationships is to effectively manage stress. **Stress** is an adaptive response that is the consequence of any action, situation, or event that places special demands on a person. A **stressor** is the external or internal force that brings about the stress. Individual differences help determine which events are stressful. Note that stress is additive, so little annoyances can mount up.

A. Symptoms and Consequences of Stress
The physiological changes that take place within the body in response to stress are responsible for most stress symptoms. The battle against the stressor is referred to as the **fight-or-flight response.** Recent studies suggest that females **tend-and-befriend** in response to a stressor. They protect and nurture (tend) and turn to social networks for support (befriend). Also, the brain senses stress as damage to well-being and therefore sends out a signal to the body to cope. The purpose of the coping is to modify the discrepancy between the ideal (low-stress) and actual (high-stress) conditions. The brain is a self-regulating system that helps us cope with stressors.

1. **Physiological Reactions.** The hormones activated to deal with the stressor
produce such physiological reactions as an increase in heart rate, blood glucose, and blood clotting. If stress is continuous and accompanied by these short-term physiological changes, annoying and life-threatening conditions can occur. A stressful life event usually leads to a high cholesterol level (of the unhealthy type) and high blood pressure.

2. *Job Performance Consequences.* Stress can also play a positive role, such as preparing us to for meeting difficult challenges and spurring us on to peak performance. In general, performance tends to be best under moderate amounts of stress. Too little stress leads to lethargy, and too much to choking. Personal and environmental factors influence the job performance consequences of stress, such as the worker who has clear job expectations and high self-esteem being less susceptible to stress.

3. *Burnout and Stress.* One of the major problems of prolonged stress is that it may lead to burnout, a condition of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion in response to long-term stressors. *Work exhaustion* is another term for burnout. Burnout contributors include feeling out of control, insufficient recognition and reward, and a lack of emotional support in the workplace. Burnout sufferers shift into a mode of doing the minimum as a way of protecting themselves.

B. Personality and Job Factors Contributing to Stress

Individual factors and job or organizational factors both contribute to stress.

1. *Personality Factors Predisposing People Toward Stress.* Personality factors influence susceptibility to stressors.

   a. *Low Perceived Control.* Perceiving that you can control adverse circumstances influences how much stress you experience. *Perceived control* is the belief that an individual has at his or her disposal a response that can control the negative aspects of an event.

   b. *Low Self-Efficacy.* Workers with low self-efficacy tend to experience more emotional strain and physical strain than do workers with high self-efficacy. People who are confident they can perform a particular task are more likely to either avoid stress or have much milder symptoms.

   c. *Type A Behavior.* A person with *Type A behavior* is demanding, impatient, and over-striving, and is therefore prone to negative stress. Free-floating hostility is also part of Type A behavior. The heart attack triggers are hostility, anger, and cynicism. All people with the Type A behavior pattern are therefore not prone to cardiac disease.
d. **Negative Affectivity.** A major contributor to being stress prone is **negative affectivity**, a tendency to experience aversive emotional states. The frequent complaining of people with negative affectivity hurts interpersonal relationships.

2. **Job Sources of Stress**
   Almost any job situation can act as a stressor for some employees, but not necessarily for others. Yet some stressors are frequently encountered.

   a. **Role Overload.** Having too much to do, or **role overload**, can create negative stress. The person may become fatigued and less tolerant of annoyances, and the person may feel perpetually behind schedule.

   b. **Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity.** Role conflict is a key stressor. **Role ambiguity** is a condition in which the job holder receives confusing or poorly defined expectations. Many people experience stress when faced with ambiguity.

   c. **Adverse Environmental Conditions.** Among the stressful environmental conditions are unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions, sick buildings and ergonomic problems. Excessive computer use can cause headaches, fatigue, and **carpal tunnel syndrome**. The latter occurs when repetitive flexing and extension of the wrist causes the tendons to swell, thus trapping and pinching the median nerve.

   d. **Job Insecurity.** Worrying about losing your job is a major stressor, even when jobs are plentiful. Downsizing and corporate mergers have contributed to job insecurity.

   e. **Workplace Violence and catastrophes.** Violence may be both the cause and the result of stress. An average of 20 people are murdered in the U.S. workplace each week, and 1 million workers are assaulted annually. Being a victim of violence, watching violence, or worrying about violence are all stressors. Witnessing a catastrophe can result in **post-traumatic disorder**, with symptoms including anxiety, nightmares, and difficulties in concentration. Many people associated with the attacks on the World Trade Center suffered from post-traumatic disorder.

D. **Methods and Techniques for Stress Management**
   Not managing stress properly can lead to harmful long-term consequences. Managing stress refers to controlling it and making it a constructive force in your
life. Coping with, or managing, stress includes hundreds of activities with substantial individual differences in which technique is effective.

1. **Eliminate or Modify the Stressor.** The most potent method of managing stress is to eliminate or modify the stressor giving you trouble. Leaving a stressful job would be one example.

2. **Get Appropriate Physical Exercise.** A moderate amount of physical exercise is a cornerstone of managing stress and achieving wellness. Look for physical challenge but not overexertion and muscle and bone injury. Physical exercise releases endorphins that lead to feelings of euphoria and are painkillers. Yoga is widely used to reduce and prevent stress.

3. **Rest Sufficiently.** Rest offers similar benefits to exercise, such as stress reduction, improved concentration, improved energy, and better tolerance for frustration. Achieving proper rest is closely linked to proper exercise.

4. **Build a Support Network.** A support network is a group of people who can listen to your problems and provide emotional support. Members of your network can provide you with a sense of closeness, warmth, and acceptance that will reduce your stress.

5. **Practice Visualization.** Visualizing a pleasant experience, like so many stress-reduction techniques including meditation, requires concentration. Concentrating helps slow down basic physiological processes such as the heart beat, and dissipates stress.

6. **Practice Everyday Methods of Stress Reduction.** Learning how to relax is an important method of reducing the tension and anxiety from both positive and negative stress. Everyday methods of stress reduction are presented in Figure 14-5.

**ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Provide an example from your own or somebody else’s life of how having a major goal in life can help a person be better organized.

   A germane example here is the many students who are focused on being successful in a specific career. The same students somehow find a way to get papers and projects done on time, and to adequately prepare for exams. The focused student perceives each assignment as a steppingstone to a compelling career goal.

2. Describe any way in which you have used information technology to make you
more productive.

A disadvantage most students will have in answering this question is that they may not be able to make before-and-after comparisons because they have used information technology for so long. Some students may be able to compare productivity between visiting a library versus conducting an Internet search for information. One person documented that the right used car can be found more quickly using the Internet that by visiting dealers.

3. Many people who use a personal digital assistant (such as contained in a hand-held computer) find that they are no more organized or productive than before. What could be their problem?

A major problem is that whether you place your to-do lists in a PDA or on the back of an envelope, your productivity will not be increased unless you consult the list regularly. And, a PDA does not have a built-in anti-procrastination device.

4. Use information in this chapter to explain how a person might be well organized and yet still not get very far in his or her career.

A person might be well organized yet not focus enough on important tasks to get ahead in his or her career. Doing small tasks efficiently may help an organization, but accomplishing these small tasks is not enough to get noticed.

5. Ask an experienced high-level worker to identify his or her most effective method of time management. Be prepared to report your findings in class.

A modal response to this question is likely to be preparing a to-do list and establishing priorities. Daily planners containing to-do lists are a universally accepted method of time management. Also, many successful businesspersons still use a notebook or 3 x 5 index cards to organize their efforts.

6. Some researchers have suggested that the term challenge be substituted for the term stressor. What do you think of the merit of their suggestion?

It may be true that challenges create stress, yet the terms stress and stressor get more directly to the seriousness of the problem. Challenge seems to be more directly linked to positive stress.

7. A student told his instructor, "You have to give me a deadline for my paper. Otherwise, I can’t handle it." What does this statement tell you about (a) the stressor he was facing, and (b) how pressure influences his work performance.
The student was facing role ambiguity stress. Some people experience stress when they lack structure. The student also needs the pressure of a deadline to motivate him to accomplish a task. He is not yet capable of creating his own deadlines.

8. Why might having your stress under control improve your interpersonal relationships?

Having stress under control helps interpersonal relationships in several ways. A person with multiple stress symptoms makes other people nervous, thereby not being an ideal friend or partner. Also, people are who experiencing considerable stress may be too preoccupied to be attentive to the needs of others.

9. If you view your career in a corporation as being a corporate athlete, how will that guide you to make better use of the information in this chapter?

As a corporate athlete, the person will strive to be as productive as possible (because he or she wants to win), and will manage stress well to allow for peak performance.

10. Interview a person in a high-pressure job in any field. Find out whether the person experiences significant stress and what method he or she uses to cope with it.

Noteworthy here is which occupations students identify as having high pressure. Students are likely to derive from the interviews a good awareness of the importance of stress management combined with a regular program of stress management. The many exceptions are that many people are not managing stress well because they suffer significant stress disorders.

**ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS**

*The New Marketing Assistant*

The marketing assistant case illustrates how job stress can interfere with well being including a negative spillover to personal life

1. Which aspects of work stress are revealed in this case?

This case illustrates how repetitive motion disorder can occur in a job that is not designed to be full-time data entry. A subtle aspect of the case is that pursuing very difficult goals can create stress. The case also illustrates that work stress leads to symptoms (such as sleeplessness) that manifest themselves at home.
2. What suggestions can you make to the company for decreasing the stressors in the position of telemarketer?

One approach for decreasing stressors would be to make the call reports less complex, thus requiring less keyboarding. Perhaps a few Yes-No questions on the form, plus room for a one-sentence comment would suffice. A more selective prospect list would decrease some of the stress from rejection by the people canvassed. Much stress could also be reduced if the quotas for telemarketers were reduced. However, this step would have to be financially feasible.

3. What advice can you offer Jennie to help her achieve wellness?

Jennie and her husband will probably have to make dramatic changes for her to achieve wellness. Jennie needs a less stressful job, and her husband needs a more secure way of earning a living to reduce Jennie’s worries about family finances. Diet and exercise will make a smaller contribution to Jennie’s feeling of wellness.

**COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES**

*Procrastination Tendencies*

An important feature of this quiz is that it helps the student identify subtle symptoms of procrastination such as number 3, "I crave the excitement of the 'last minute rush.'" Many people laugh off procrastination as not being a serious problem. Taking the quiz may help the student think more seriously about procrastination.

*Using a Mission Statement and Goals to Power Work Habits*

This exercise can become a major planning tool in life. The exercise helps people translate lofty purposes in life into short-term goals to achieve those purposes. A side purpose of this exercise is to reinforce the idea that goal setting is characteristic of successful people.

*Productivity Boosting on the Internet*

An important purpose served by this exercise is to think through the purposes of using the Internet. Too many people accept the Internet as an obligatory work and personal life activity without understanding how the Internet might improve productivity. Corporate managers and small-business persons have found dozens of ways for boosting productivity through the Internet, including saving time in searching for
information and making purchases. Another example of a productivity booster would be selling goods inexpensively.

Personal productivity might be boosted in such ways as obtaining travel information quickly, making purchases over the Internet to save time visiting malls, and locating where to find certain merchandise. However, whether productivity is boosted depends on what is done with the time saved by using the Internet.

*Visualization for Stress Reduction*

The visualization technique has remarkable power considering how little time and effort is required for its implementation. Experienced visualizers in the class might want to report on the success (or failure) they have had with this technique. A hilarious class discussion is for volunteers to describe the relaxing scenes they are visualizing.
EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice

(b) 1. An analysis of procrastination suggests that the condition is a(n)
   a. type of immature behavior that is readily controllable.
   b. profound, debilitating problem.
   c. simple problem calling for an attitude adjustment.
   d. indication of brain dysfunction.

(a) 2. Breaking a task down into manageable chunks is aimed at overcoming procrastination due to
   a. dislike of an overwhelming task.
   b. dislike of a task with several components.
   c. looking to punish oneself.
   d. craving the excitement of rushing to make a deadline.

(b) 3. Having a mission in life is likely to
   a. make you a workaholic.
   b. propel you toward being more productive.
   c. make short-range goals superfluous.
   d. propel you toward self-employment.

(d) 4. One of the requirements for playing the *inner game of work* is to
   a. keep a running scoreboard of your progress.
   b. perform yoga at least three times per week.
   c. criticize yourself regularly so you do not become too smug.
   d. remove inner obstacles to performance such as self-criticism.

(c) 5. Working smarter, not harder means that the person
   a. puts extra effort into every task.
   b. spends very little time planning.
   c. finds imaginative solutions to problems.
   d. avoids perfectionistic attitudes.

(c) 6. Studies involving 9,000 workers found that employees who were late
   a. were usually above-average performers.
   b. were among the most creative workers.
   c. also tended to have poor absenteeism records.
   d. tended to have superior absenteeism records.

(d) 7. At the heart of every time-management system is (are)
   a. techniques for overcoming procrastination
b. a method of work streamlining.
c. developing a mission and vision.
d. computerized scheduling of work.

(a) 8. A major purpose of work streamlining is to
   a. minimize duplication of effort and waste.
   b. increase the speed at which you work.
   c. get your to-do list down to less than 10 items per day.
   d. share your responsibilities with others.

(b) 9. A key feature of a virtual office is that it
   a. is set up in the home.
   b. does not have a fixed physical location.
   c. is wireless.
   d. is linked to other offices by satellite.

(a) 10. A productivity-building suggestion for working out of the home is to
   a. schedule regular times for meals and snacks.
   b. conduct some of your personal life while working to reduce stress.
   c. minimize contact with teammates.
   d. keep your work area or office open all the time.

(d) 11. A suggestion for making Internet searches more productive is to
   a. use quite general search words and phrases.
   b. first search the encyclopedia on a CD-ROM.
   c. confine your search to one search engine.
   d. pay extra attention to your choice of a search word or phrase.

(a) 12. Whether or not a given activity (such as chatting with coworkers) is a time waster depends on the
   a. purpose of the activity.
   b. time of the workday it takes place.
   c. person performing the activity.
   d. how rapidly it is carried out.

(d) 13. A problem with accumulating a number of minor annoyances from a stress perspective is that
   a. ten minor annoyances typically result in cardiac disease.
   b. a handful of minor annoyances usually results in burnout.
   c. a person loses the ability to cope with significant stress.
   d. small amounts of stress add together to create large stress.
(b) 14. The purpose of the *tend-and-befriend response* among females is to  
   a. cultivate new friends to help them become more productive.  
   b. cope with a significant stressor.  
   c. attack burnout directly.  
   d. combat males who choose the fight-or-flight response.

(c) 15. Decreases in performance in response to job stress are the least likely to occur when the worker has  
   a. a low commitment to the organization.  
   b. unclear job assignments.  
   c. high self-esteem.  
   d. high levels of Type A behavior.

(a) 16. Burnout takes place in response to  
   a. long-term exposure to stressors.  
   b. being a Type-A personality.  
   c. handling a crisis.  
   d. job insecurity and job loss.

(b) 17. Your susceptibility to job stress decreases when you have  
   a. low perceived control.  
   b. high perceived control.  
   c. a Type A personality.  
   d. a low tolerance for frustration.

(d) 18. Two studies found that when soldiers were faced with long work hours and work overload, high levels of self-efficacy,  
   a. brought about burnout sooner.  
   b. eliminated almost all stress.  
   c. hampered their ability to cope with these stressors.  
   d. helped them cope better with these stressors.

(d) 19. People with negative affectivity are likely to  
   a. blame other people for their problems.  
   b. think that coworkers are pessimists.  
   c. aspire toward goals beyond their capability.  
   d. frequently experience emotional stress.

(c) 20. After a downsizing, office manager Jackie has to perform her job plus that of her former supervisor. Jackie is likely to experience stress from role  
   a. underload.  
   b. conflict.  
   c. overload.
d. ambiguity.

(d) 21. Carpal tunnel syndrome takes place when the
a. neck aches from staring at the monitor.
b. muscles in the wrist deteriorate from overuse.
c. main tendon in the hand ruptures from overuse.
d. median nerve in the wrist is trapped and pinched.

(a) 22. Post-traumatic disorder is most likely to take place in response to
a. a workplace catastrophe.
b. role ambiguity.
c. working with a poorly designed computer configuration.
d. long working hours.

(a) 23. The most important strategy for coping with job-related stress is to
a. talk out your problems.
b. learn how to relax.
c. eliminate or modify the stressor.
d. have your job redesigned.

(b) 24. Members of a person’s support network typically help a person reduce
stress by
a. recommending a source of help.
b. listening and offering emotional support.
c. giving advice on stress reduction.
d. convincing him or her not to worry.

(c) 25. The visualization technique for stress reduction requires that the stressed
person
a. imagine what life would be without stress.
b. create a mental scenario of a highly-charged, exciting experience.
c. think of a pleasant, relaxing experience.
d. imagine that he or she can conquer any problem.

True/False

(F) 1. Personal productivity refers to how much work a person accomplishes in a
given period of time such as a day or week.

(T) 2. A recommended method for controlling procrastination is to tackle the worst
task on your list first, so doing the other items might function like a small reward.
3. An effective way of combating procrastination is to develop the attitude of enjoying the rush of scrambling for deadlines.

4. An example of a self-given reward for procrastinating is going for a walk in the park before getting started on a key project.

5. A useful assist in getting better organized is to establish a personal mission with accompanying goals.

6. To play the *inner game of work* you play video games or surf the Internet to relieve stress.

7. Working smarter, not harder, is a method of increasing personal productivity because you minimize wasting effort in accomplishing your goals.

8. Cleanliness and orderliness improves productivity mostly in stiff, bureaucratic jobs that do not require imagination.

9. Workaholics are noted for their ability to enjoy personal life as much as they enjoy their work.

10. At the heart of every time-management system is list making.

11. The modern approach of multitasking is recommended for dealing with your most important work assignments.

12. A *virtual office* adds to productivity because it is small, neat, and contains just enough office equipment to accomplish the job.

13. A recommended procedure for working at home is to leave the house for a few minutes just before starting work.

14. Whether or not a given activity is a time waster depends on the *purpose* of the activity.

15. According to the *tend-and-befriend response*, women nurture their children and turn to their support network in response to a major stressor.

16. According to one theory of stress, when the brain senses damage to well-being it sends out a signal for the body to cope.

17. Job performance tends to be best when we experience such a light amount of stress that it is hardly detectable.
18. Decreases in job performance in response to stress are less likely to take place when the worker has (a) a clear job description, and (b) high self-esteem.

19. Burnout comes about as a reaction to being stressed out for a long period of time.

20. When workers believe they can control a given adverse circumstance, their stress level rises because they know how much they will have to struggle.

21. The lower your level of self-efficacy, the higher your stress level is likely to be.

22. A sick building is one in which the managers have such low emotional intelligence that they create stress for many employees.

23. Many survivors of the attacks on the World Trade Center, or those who had family members and friends involved, suffered from post-traumatic disorders.

24. The most powerful method of managing stress is to eliminate or modify the stressor.

25. Many stress busters are basically everyday methods of relaxation.