

# Emotional rescue

Pressure at work can rack up stress and even lead to illness, but understanding and acknowledging your emotions can help you manage it, as Ben Rawal FCCA explains

Handling a high-pressure situation is something that we all deal with from time to time. How we cope with such pressure is determined by us rather than the behaviour of others or the situation itself.

Some people get frustrated or aggressive; others maintain a calmer demeanour. The reality is that our responses are determined by multiple

factors, including mood, beliefs, expectations and emotional control.

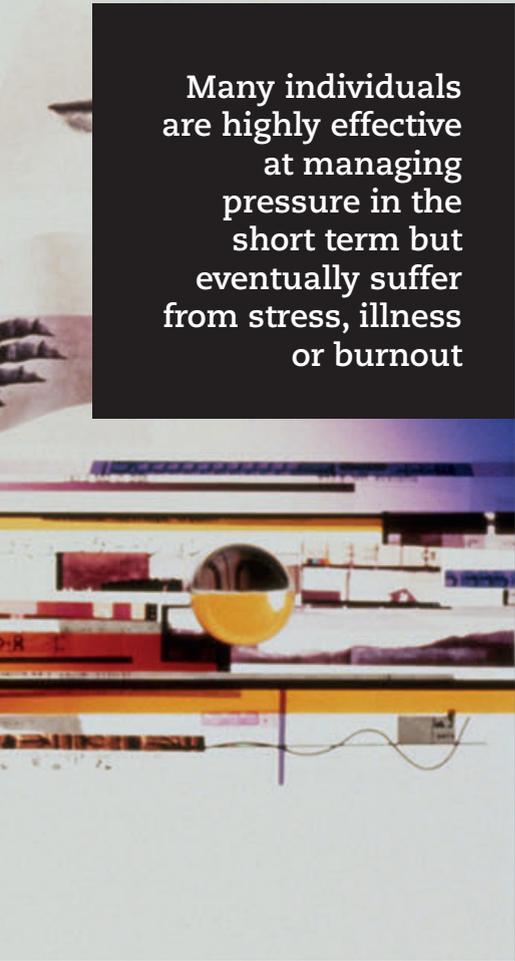
Our ability to work under pressure and deal with stress is contingent on how effectively we manage our emotions. However, sound emotional control also relies on whether or not we understand and validate our feelings sufficiently to manage stress in the long term. This distinction is important, as

many individuals are highly effective at managing pressure in the short term but eventually suffer from stress, illness or burnout over a longer period. So it is important to recognise and understand the effect of each of our emotions – the physiological response that occurs as our emotions change.

For example, anger affects physiology in several ways: the heart rate increases,



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however, don't have this skill. Instead, we bring other traits to bear to help us deal with increased pressure, such as calmness. Although this can help in the management of stress, ultimately it doesn't help address the 'real' emotions that we're feeling and, at times, choosing to ignore. It's emotional avoidance rather than emotional validation and acceptance.

Although a manageable strategy in the short term, emotional avoidance can gradually raise stress, and lead to illness, difficulty in sleeping or uncontrollable outbursts in and out of work.

### Red flags

Some indicators that we are failing to manage stress are more noticeable to others than to ourselves. Other people may point out how moody we seem or the more physical manifestations of appearing tired or ill. These are important tell-tale signs that we're not recognising and managing our stress levels effectively, even if we think we are.

In addition to improving emotional awareness, other factors such as willpower and positivity can help in

managing pressure. Research has demonstrated that willpower is a limited resource that can quickly be exhausted. For some individuals, this depletion can take place towards the end of the working day or week, and is likely to impact levels of concentration, particularly when working on complex tasks. So it is important to consider the frequency and magnitude of stressful activities, and pace yourself accordingly.

Similarly, trying to keep a positive mindset can be beneficial when working under pressure. But at times, despite our best intentions, other people's negativity and dissatisfaction can influence how we feel and cause stress to feel less tolerable. To some extent, emotions are contagious, so making sensible choices about who to interact with can be the difference between feeling anxious or content.

If you are starting the new year already under pressure, take some time to acknowledge this and consider applying some of the tips in the box below. **AB**

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some muscles tighten, and the ability to think logically and rationally is temporarily lost. Each of the primary emotions – anger, fear, enjoyment, sadness, love, surprise, disgust and shame – results in a different physiological response. Individuals with high levels of self-awareness can recognise these physiological changes and acknowledge the emotion or emotions they are feeling.

Strong emotional recognition is an important aspect of dealing with pressure. It enables the individual to change their actions before the pressure becomes unmanageable, and also highlights undesirable shifts in how the individual feels. Most of us,

## Top tips for pressure relief

- \* **Self-awareness.** Our emotions impact our physiology and change the way we feel. Recognising these changes can be helpful in understanding when we're under too much pressure and need to consider alternative options for dealing with the stress. Keeping a record of your physiological changes when experiencing intense emotions can help to provide an early warning.
- \* **Emotional validation and acceptance.** Validating and accepting your feelings will help you face rather than avoid your emotional experience. In reality, feelings come and go, and rarely remain at the level of intensity that they are sometimes experienced at. What is important is how you respond to your emotions and the behaviour you choose to exhibit.
- \* **Willpower.** Recognising that your willpower is a limited resource can help you determine when and how high-pressure and complex tasks should be tackled. Try to ensure that you hold some willpower 'in reserve'.
- \* **Positivity.** Remaining positive is sometimes more difficult than it seems when excessive pressure is being experienced. You can improve your chances by surrounding yourself with positive individuals.