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# Keeping your office healthy

Tips to keep you office healthy and stress free. *By Dr. Susan Maples*

Q: I am a manager in a small business and in our office there's a lot of disharmony. We often go home depleted and come back joy-less to start the next day. What can we do to improve our office "health"?

A: Ah, you are not alone. Stress at work is a big issue right now—especially as businesses try to do more with less. People are fearful about scarcity and decreased job security. All this negative emotion challenges our abilities for positive, future-focused collaboration.

Create regularly scheduled communication time. During these meetings, shift the focus from what we are "doing" to who we "are" as individuals, as a work group, as a company. Begin to focus on the elements of our work that hold more value than money. Research reveals that the first three (money being fifth) are as follows:

- 1) **Full appreciation of work done.** Discuss ideas about how to develop habits of expressing gratitude and appreciation—specifically, personally, privately and publically (in front of co-workers and customers). Learn to champion each other in new ways and it will change your work life!
- 2) **A sense of belonging.** Being an integral part of a purposeful group is powerful. Describe the big picture-- reminding each other what you are creating and how it serves people. Celebrate little successes. Also, create opportunities for your co-workers and their families to gather socially in order to form caring bonds beyond your work environment.
- 3) **Help on personal problems.** No kidding. Former US Secretary of State, Colin Powell stated "*The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost their confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either way is a failure of leadership.*" Many work cultures ask people to park personal problems at the door. Is it even possible to disconnect your head and heart from your work day? Dialogue about how to support one another without infringing on your purpose or your customer- focus. Remember that geese fly in formation for a reason—one takes a turn leading the flock when he is strong and drops back when he grows weary.

Have a meeting or retreat to uncover your common *core values*. That is the connection that creates sustainability as a team. Values are personal views of worth such as integrity, kindness,

forgiveness, fun, patience, etc. Values are NOT personality traits. If personality differences are getting in the way, try working with a coach or consultant. Personality differences can actually be *celebrated* as we learn more about our variant communication styles.