

STOP THE BOSS

BURN OUT STRESS SYNDROME

Stress is Action Month theme

Stress is the theme of his year's UNI Action Month for customer service professionals around the world.

For unions, tackling stress in call centres is a key issue.

Unions are there to negotiate for a more humane workplace and to provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress.

They can help win justice for those already injured and look for the solutions to reducing stress for the future.

Call centre employers should consult with unions and their health and safety reps to produce an agreed agenda for preventing workplace stress.

Workloads and targets need to be in line with workers' capabilities and resources.

Customer service professionals need to be a part of the decision making about their jobs - and there needs to be better communication.

There needs to be a more clear definition of workers' roles and responsibilities and jobs should be designed to provide meaning, stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills.

It's an ongoing battle against stress - measures need to be regularly reviewed to ensure their effectiveness.

Look out for the symptoms of stress

Do you recognise these physical symptoms??

- Increased susceptibility to colds and other infections
- Headaches
- Muscular tension
- Backache and neckache
- Excessive tiredness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Digestive problems
- Raised heart rate
- Increased sweating
- Lower sex drive
- Skin rashes
- Blurred vision?

There are emotional and behavioural changes - do they sound familiar??

- Wanting to cry much of the time
- Feeling that you can't cope
- Short tempered at work and at home
- Feeling you've achieved nothing at the end of the day
- Eating when you're not hungry
- Losing your appetite
- Smoking and drinking to get through the day
- Inability to plan, concentrate and control work
- Getting less work done
- Poor relationships with colleagues or clients
- Loss of motivation and commitment?

We have some tips on self-help. But if you're persistently stressed out then it's time to talk to your union rep.

www.stoptheboss.org



STRESS SPECIAL

Meet fellow call centre workers from around the world - we have profiles of customer service professionals from Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Holland, India, the Philippines, USA and others on our special action month website.

Find them at:
www.stoptheboss.org



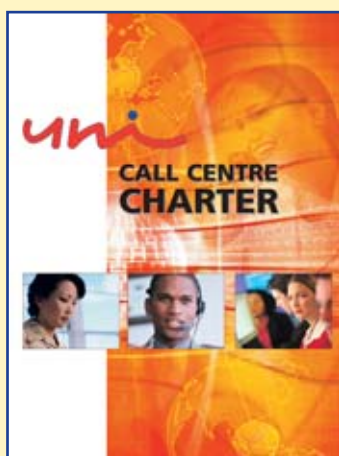
Sharon Arroyo has worked for Standard Chartered Bank in the Philippines for three years. "It's a tough job handling difficult clients and attending to problem accounts," she tells the www.stoptheboss.org website.

Why is it important to connect call centre workers globally? "Collective power for job security," is Sharon's reply.





Sindhu Ravi works part time for HCL Technology Noida in India in voice based technical processes. "I love resolving issues, so I love my job." "Since companies are going global, employee globalisation is very important."



UNI Call Centre Charter

UNI has produced a Charter that aims to set global, minimum standards for call centres.

Already some of our ideas have been incorporated into a Europe-wide agreement with telecom operators.

The Charter deals with health and safety, including stress, as well as working time and workload.

It tackles equal opportunities and access to training - along with clear rights to join unions and to bargain collectively.

Download your copy from:

www.stoptheboss.com

Work-related stress is a health and safety issue

Stress at work is increasingly common, affecting all categories of workers, all workplaces and all countries.

It can have harmful consequences for physical, mental and social well-being. A healthy workplace is not only one with minimal levels of injury and illness, but also one that has "balanced and appropriate internal relations conducive to good health and well-being".

Stress is "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them". Work-related stress is a symptom of an organisational problem - NOT an individual weakness.

Work-related stress can manifest itself as physical and emotional health problems, and as altered ways of behaving at work and at home.

It's common for customer service reps to receive extra pay linked to performance. This could lead to operators increasing their work speed to get more pay.

Too much focus on remuneration may also affect the atmosphere among staff and undermine solidarity at the company.

There has to be a balance between the reward - wages, promotion and benefits - and the effort involved.

Identify which situations stress you most.

Assess the risk and potential causes of stress risk factors that can be causes of work-related stress.

These are:

- The demands of your job
- Your control over your work
- The support you receive from managers and colleagues
- Your relationships at work
- Your role in the organisation
- Change and how it's managed.

It can seem hard to confront the causes of workplace stress and to ask for help.

But sometimes, support and advice is necessary to help you deal with difficulties at work, whether it's to clarify your job role and responsibilities, or to deal with bullying at work.

It's important to talk to your union or health and safety rep, to your supervisor or Human Resources.

In workplaces that provide a service outside normal working hours, it can be difficult to meet the demands of the service without compromising the work-life balance of staff.

Your union rep can help you create individual solutions that help employees deal with these personal sources of pressure, while continuing to meet the demands of the service.

Unions seek curbs on surveillance



UNI global union is urging the European Union and the International Labour Organisation to take greater steps to protect the privacy of workers from new technology surveillance.

Our campaign against uncontrolled surveillance of workers includes the continuous monitoring of phone calls, computer keystrokes and emails. In call centres, unions want stricter rules for monitoring phone calls.

"We want respect and dignity at work," says UNI General Secretary Philip Jennings.

"It's about dignity and respect. Unions must not be hostages of the IT-enabled technologies that shape call centres. We have to break this vicious circle of stress and poor working conditions."

Silvio Woollands, FOEESITRA Argentina



Some self-help tips

It's impossible to escape pressure at work altogether. But there are a number of ways in which you can reduce the negative impact of stress, most of which involve taking a good look at how you function at work and beyond.

■ Changes at work

Make time to relax at work by stretching and breathing deeply. This will help you to keep focused and prevent tired muscles. Simply ensuring you get outside for a walk during your lunch break can be helpful.

■ Lifestyle changes

Regular physical activity helps to reduce stress levels. It provides valuable "time out" and can trigger brain chemicals that improve your mood. A brisk daily walk is ideal, but the main thing is to choose an activity that you enjoy.

■ Learn to relax

Learning to relax can improve sleep and relieve stress-related physical pains such as stomach pains and headaches. Get details of adult education classes where you can learn helpful techniques. Libraries loan books, tapes or computer-based packages.

■ Things to avoid

Avoid unhelpful responses to stress like increased alcohol intake, smoking and high caffeine intake, as these all increase stress levels. Regular meals and a balanced, high-fibre diet will provide sustained levels of energy.

■ Reflections

At the end of the day, reflect on what you've achieved rather than worrying about future work. Don't be too hard on yourself and remember to take each day as it comes.

■ Actions

Raise issues of concern with your union or your Safety Rep, with your supervisor or Human Resources department.

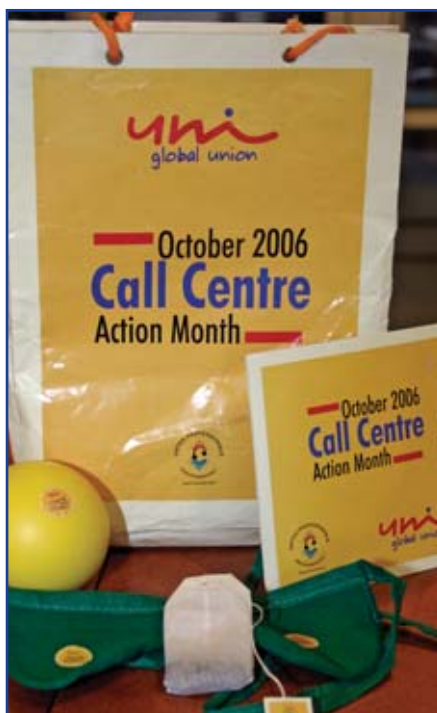
Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.

Make sure you take regular breaks.

Learn relaxation techniques and take up a regular physical activity.

* A fuller version of our stress leaflet can be downloaded from:
www.stoptheboss.org

UNI has produced a Stress Kit for the global action month



Jan Minkiewicz works at the ADSL helpdesk with KPN Contact in Enschede, Netherlands. Most important for well-being at work is to: "Focus on the quality of service and create the conditions to be able to focus on quality instead of quantity".



Raghavan Iyengar works for HSBC in India. 31 years old. The pay is good as is the brand name, he tells us. But there is stress - answering banking customers and finding solutions all day. "Sometimes it becomes monotonous and I would feel like taking a break and spending some precious time outside."

"The more unions at the national and global level work together the more they can influence the future direction of this industry."

Professor Rose Batt, Cornell University USA



Austria's GPA has produced a special campaign leaflet and poster

Focus on acoustic shock

Unions around the world are putting the spotlight on Acoustic Shock. Acoustic Shock is thought to occur when a loud and unexpected sound - a shriek or a spike - comes down the phone line and into the headset. In Australia the ASU has had reports of acoustic shock from members over several years.

The ASU is working with key government authorities, medical researchers and legal authorities to determine beyond doubt the causes. Injuries can range from pain and discomfort to a degenerative loss of hearing or even a ruptured inner ear membrane. In the United Kingdom unions - including the CWU - are cooperating with a public-private initiative, the Acoustic Safety Programme. ASP is working with telephony equipment manufacturers and is starting independent testing of equipment with the renowned National Physical Laboratory.

At a recent Acoustic Safety conference Government Minister Lord Hunt stressed the importance of measures to protect the hearing of Britain's one million call centre workers. ASP aims to define acoustic shock and to launch a three-year national study into it. (www.acousticshock.org)



Key role for health and safety reps in tackling stress

Union Health and Safety Representatives have a key role to play in the war on stress. They should be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress. They should be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process. They should conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least every three months to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled. They must be able to consult with members over stress, including running workplace surveys. They should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from Human Resource departments. And safety reps should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any union training on workplace stress.



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