

**The Chartered Management Institute's Short Course Programme  
in association with ProSeminar**

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## **Can training help you manage stress?**

***As ProSeminar launches its new one-day course 'Managing Stress' we look at the contribution that training can make to stress management.***

'Everyone suffers stress and everyone can benefit from this programme' says Philip Moon, ProSeminar's Managing Director and presenter of the Managing Stress course. 'But' he continues 'it's important to make a distinction between 'normal' and 'chronic' stress. We're trying to help people deal with 'normal' stress so that it doesn't turn into the kind of 'chronic' stress that leads to breakdown.' Philip is keen to be cautious and emphasises that this kind of training is not appropriate for someone who's reached crisis point. 'Once an individual has reached breakdown they need professional help in the form of some kind clinical intervention or therapy. We're looking at preventive action.'

ProSeminar's course focuses on equipping participants with positive coping strategies and helping them develop a personal plan accordingly. At the 'first level', stress results from an imbalance between situation (such as workload or conflict) and the ability to cope with the situation. At this level, practical steps involve changing the situation by, for instance, reducing workloads, improving processes or working patterns etc. On the other side of the equation, action could include developing skills such as prioritising, self-organisation or assertiveness skills etc.

'But' Philip concedes 'stress doesn't just come from this imbalance. It's not the situation or our ability to cope that causes stress, it's the way we perceive the situation and our ability that counts. You could put two people of equal ability into comparable situations - one might be stressed and the other might not.' What's involved here is the cognitive appraisal - the way the individual looks at the situation and their abilities. It's about positive and negative attribution styles. A positive attribution style helps keep things,

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**Short Course for Management & Professional Development**

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particularly adversity, in perspective. A negative attribution style makes the individual feel that the situation is hopeless, that it's all their fault, always their fault and that they're useless.

Another factor the course emphasises is the need to avoid negative coping strategies. Stress often produces behaviours which exacerbate the situation and damage the ability to cope. These may include withdrawal, over-eating (comfort eating), drinking, and watching too much television. Negative strategies can also include working harder. 'If you're stressed because you've got too much work to do,' Philip points out, 'working harder, or longer, isn't really a viable long-term solution. Working longer may just make you more tired and less efficient. Giving up evenings and weekends to work can just be a way of avoiding the real issues and making matters worse.' A sensible work-life balance is crucial. Unfortunately when people begin to get really stressed it can be one of the first things to be compromised.

Recognising the problems and pitfalls is an important part of avoiding them. But coming from this there needs to be a positive and personal strategy to tackle the issues on a broad front. Here the course focuses on how to get control at work, how to develop emotional resilience and how to manage the work-home stress flow.

ProSeminar's course also provides managers with a better understanding of how pressure and stress affect the people around them. A lot of performance problems, which may be seen as carelessness, disorganisation or demotivation, are often down to stress. Many managers have to deal, on a daily basis, with the reality of managing stressed staff and dealing with stressed colleagues. While work-based stress is only one cause of depression, the high incidence of depression amongst the workforce staggering - something like one in every eight people suffers clinical depression which often goes undiagnosed. All organisations have a duty of care for their staff and a responsibility to provide a healthy and safe working environment.