

Why It's Profitable To Address Stress in the Workplace

by Joy Poland



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It is becoming widely recognized and understood that “human capital value” — or what we call “people” — is a critical metric for the 21st century. It is the driving force behind most business value today and great strides are being taken to quantify, map and measure it.

But wait, how much does your employee well-being have to do with financial performance?

[Thriving employees](#) have 41% lower health costs (62% overall) and a 35% lower turnover rate than those who are struggling. Over \$300B can be directly attributed to **stress**, or stress related costs.

When [Building Bridges 2012 Consultants](#) began to take on the task of creating new ways to develop human capital value and develop the metrics needed to measure it, we decided we needed to first identify the core of what human capital actually is before crafting the strategy to develop and quantify it. What we came to realize was that people basically exist on 4 levels — mental, emotional, physical and [energetic](#) —and for humans to function at optimal capacity we must be balanced, healthy and thriving on all of those levels. People functioning as balanced, healthy and thriving individuals are **empowered**. When people are empowered, life works; when they are not, it doesn't (and we are currently experiencing the latter).

In establishing criteria to measure empowerment we decided to explore what *prevents* empowerment and then we would use that data to create the strategies to eliminate impediments. Our team came up with three main debilitating factors that prevent empowerment across all populations and demographics:

- Stress (fear)
- Limiting & negative beliefs
- Toxins (physical and energetic)

It is the inability to effectively deal with stress ([fear](#)), to replace outdated ways of thinking ([worldviews](#)), and to avoid/eliminate [toxins](#) in the body and the body's energy system that creates disempowerment.

It is our position that the core metric that drives everything we do centers on empowerment or a lack thereof. And it is the concept of empowerment that will either be the value “killer” or the value “driver” of human capital value for the 21st-century business.

This article intends to address the first debilitating factor affecting human capital value: **Stress (Fear)**

According to the [CDC](#), job stress costs employers more than \$300 billion in related costs a year due to absenteeism, tardiness, burnout, lower productivity, higher turnover, worker compensation and disability claims, accidents, safety issues and medical expenses; put into perspective, this figure amounts to more than 10 times the costs of all strikes combined, or the sum total profits of the Fortune 500 companies. Among the nation’s top executives, an estimated \$10-20 billion is lost per year through absence, hospitalizations and early death.

Depression costs \$44 billion a year in lost productivity, is the single highest cause of worker absenteeism, and psychosocial stress is estimated to account for [33% of worker compensation costs](#). Stress is the leading cause of both short- and long-term disability, with recognized links between stress and back problems, cardiovascular issues and depression.

Stress has now been linked to 90% of all of our diseases and health care costs in the US, which now **exceed 2.3 trillion**, and the two conditions that increase the risk of disease the most, creating tomorrow’s highest claims, are stress and metabolic syndrome.

Additionally, research has proven that people cannot learn, function, and perform optimally under high amounts of stress and highly stressed employees cannot perform with the [emotional intelligence](#) necessary to achieve operational excellence. They:

- Make more mistakes
- Hide them longer
- Avoid challenges
- Are less creative
- Produce less
- Show up to work mentally and physically fatigued

Highly stressed personnel in customer service positions often alienate clients and are unresponsive to their problems (It costs 5-6 times more to capture a new client/customer than it does to retain one).

Highly stressed managers [spread stress virally](#) throughout an organization.

Research and our own physiology also clearly demonstrates that stress (fear) prevents growth and creates disease.



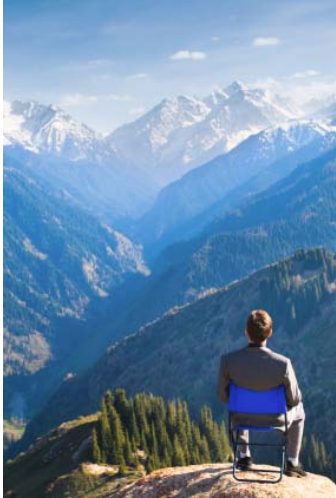
The physiological affects of stress can be explained very easily through the lens of our very biology. According to [Bruce Lipton](#), an internationally recognized leader in bridging science and spirit, stem-cell biologist, bestselling author of the *Biology of Belief* and recipient of the 2009 Goi Peace award, “Cells ... are either in growth, open to the environment and assimilating what’s going on, or in protection, shutting themselves down waiting for the environment to clear itself before again expressing their normal functions. We are a community of cells that responds to perceptions generated by our central nervous system.”

The more we live in fear, the more we allocate our energy into protection. The more afraid we become, the more we shut down growth—to the extent that we can be scared to death. In the world that we live in today, the protection response has become a greater and greater percentage of our everyday life experience; most of us are living with high levels of stress, which is continuously debilitating our systems and interfering with growth.

The bottom line for profitability and business strategies can be stated quite simply with the old saying, “Don’t put the cart before the horse.” You cannot develop human capital and [grow people](#) if everyone is completely stressed out! We can have the best strategies for employee engagement, leadership trainings, operational excellence and efficiencies, and strategic sales strategies, but if people are stressed and sick, operating in survival mode, all these great business strategies are moot.

We also concluded that there is a very fine line between stress and excitement. Often we will hear our business owners or executives say that they are not stressed, “that they thrive on the thrill and excitement their day brings” but what they are really thriving on is the body’s addiction to the stress hormone, [cortisol](#).

Unlike the human ego, the body knows when it is producing stress hormones and adrenaline, or positive, life-affirming hormones such as DHEA and oxytocin; too much cortisol in the system [creates disease and inhibits cortical functioning \(thinking\)](#). The other unfortunate thing is that so many people have become accustomed to living in the stress response they don’t even realize they are in it and that they are continually bombarding their system with cortisol and the negative repercussions that is having.



We created the [Nura/Building Bridges Empowerment Assessment](#) to identify and measure people's level of empowerment and what is affecting it. When we look at the stress aspect of the assessment one of the main metrics of stress is change: How much change is currently being experienced at both the individual level and the organizational level? We have found in our assessments that high amounts of reported change in many different areas tends to indicate higher levels of stress. Human beings simply do not do change well and helping people navigate changing paradigms is a core element of empowerment training. Another stress metric is perception. When individuals have consistent negative definitions of events and circumstances (the glass half-empty) and continue to “re-act” in the same way to those events and circumstances that is another indicator of the tendency for higher stress levels both individually and organizationally. The next article will focus on negative limiting beliefs and perceptions and how the way we think creates our experiences and is directly correlated to stress and our level of empowerment.

The bottom line: By effectively addressing the issues of empowerment, stress (fear), limiting belief systems, and [high levels of toxicity](#) in our systems with holistic, comprehensive [wellness and education programs](#), and incorporating [strategies of stress reduction](#) and wellness into the fabric of the company culture at every level, we can create an empowered workforce, slow the production of disease, reduce healthcare costs and drive human capital value.

In the times in which we are all living now I can not think of a more important metric to establish, utilize and implement into every business and business model.