Positive Stress and the Future of Total Worker Health: An Emerging Paradigm

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Tuesday, 7 October 2014
Session 3.1: Symposium – 12:30 PM – 1:45 PM
Quick Highlights
A Career Focused on Emotionally Health Work

- Forged collaboration with MD, MPH brother
  - Translated prevention into a work stress context
  - One major application in base closure (1995-2001)
    - $33M cost avoidance, no deaths & workplace violence

- Founding Editor (APA)
  - Journal of Occupational Health Psychology
  - Current editor of the Handbook of OHP, 2/e

  - Psychological Health Advisory Committee
On the Eve of a Century of Stress
‘The Fighting Emotions’

Walter Bradford Cannon (1915/1929)

— The ‘emergency’ (Fight-or-Flight) response

The mind-body prepares
1. Change in blood flow
2. Increase alertness
3. Release of fuels
4. Depressed immunity
Yes, Stress Can Kill You
Risk of Resistance...the personal struggle

Hans Selye: 1930s – 1970s
- Endocrine (Hormone) System

General Adaptation Syndrome
1. Alarm – Cannon’s emergency response
2. Resistance – the ‘at risk’ phase
3. Exhaustion – diseases of adaptation

George Vaillant –
- Successful adaptation to stress enables us to live
1. Zest and Work –
   - Approach life/work with anticipation, energy, excitement

2. Psychological Ownership –
   - A positive resource to impact human work performance

3. Employee Psychological Well-Being –
   - Cardiovascular health – CVD as our #1 killer

4. Secure attachments –
   - Trust as an enabler of autonomous and collaborative work

5. Positive Leadership –
   - Leader self-structure and follower relationships

The Perils of Positivity
Hackman’s Skeptical Point of View

1. POS with an organizational emphasis? –
2. Ahistorical character of POB? –
3. Construct validity of key constructs? –
4. Over-reliance on a particular research strategy? –
5. Implicit acceptance of fundamental flaws? –
6. Seductiveness of new research paradigm? –

• Luthans and Avolio – use to deepen inquiry

What about Total Worker Health?
Begin with Organizational Prevention and Protection

The theory of preventive stress management™ –

Principle 1: Individual and organizational health are interdependent.

Principle 2: Leaders have a responsibility for individual and organizational health.

What should leaders and managers do –

• Involve and engage workers
• Create pathways for growth and development
• Recognize employees – public praise

Pathways to Positive Health
A Model of Positive Stress Should Include…

Total worker health includes personal responsibility –

- Strength of character – integrity first
- Self-awareness – a personal intelligence
- Work–life balance – work in context
- Self–reliance – do it yourself, or ask for help
- Diverse supportive relationships

Concluding Questions
Thoughts to Ponder for the Future

➢ How do we continue to clarify the positive?
  – Challenge stress can lead to strength, mastery
  – Adversity in the right dose can be good, positive
  – Positivity has its limits; too much is dangerous

➢ How do we benefit from the negative?
  – Positive–negative interactions must be explored
  – Negative conditions can trigger positive responses

➢ How do we advance scientific practice?
  – Reject dogma and skepticism; argue the evidence
Questions and Comments

What is a Goolsby Scholar?

A Goolsby Scholar is a leader. One who has demonstrated the ability to be successful in scholarship, business and life. One who has strong character, uncompromising ethical standards and healthy self-confidence. One who has demonstrated not only those strengths in themselves, but who has the ability to identify and develop those strengths in others while building lasting relationships.

John L. Goolsby ’64