

5 Minutes With... Christopher Shen

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Agenda: What are the early warning signs for a collective of stressed and strained employees?

The problem is that usually there are no overt signs. Managers tend to overestimate the extent to which they can gauge whether their employees are stressed and strained. Nevertheless, managers who always strive to help and assist employees are more likely to detect stress. Rather than seek signs, managers should understand the main sources of stress.

Agenda: How can organisations work with existing staff to get through the skills crisis and its consequences, such as increased work expectations?

CEOs and senior managers naturally become more aware of their effect on staff when they distance themselves from the work environment and reflect upon the broader values they would like to achieve.

If they reflect upon questions such as, "What are the injustices in society I would like to become involved in redressing?", or "What are my distinct qualities that I would like to utilise to fulfil this goal?", and "What are some of my personal limitations that I would like to work on in the future?", they will become more intuitive and sensitive to their own values. This sensitivity tends to enhance their capacity to emphasise and understand other people.

Agenda: Do many managers mistakenly see stressed and agitated employees as a sign of focus and productivity?

Yes. A perfect environment is when employees like to challenge themselves - that is, when employees choose to engage in stressful or novel situations to enhance their skills and experiences, coinciding with a sense of control or followed by sufficient recovery and reward.

A problematic environment is when employees feel compelled to engage in these situations. Unfortunately, on the surface, these behaviours of employees appear identical, and managers cannot differentiate optimal from suboptimal behaviour.

Agenda: What are the most important changes for an organisation to make if it is committed to moving away from a culture of negative stress?

Anxiety and burnout are pervasive impediments to mental health. Undue emphasis on tangible targets and overwhelming focus on work at the expense of personal activities compromises health and wellbeing.

Instead, it is important for organisations to create an environment where employees are able to set their own motivating goals, with constructive support, guidance, feedback and positive encouragement from managers.

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