

Defusing 'Desk Rage'

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It's another day in the office and you have several deadlines to meet. As you open a document on your computer, the file shuts down and the computer freezes. "What?" you shout. "I need that file!" Then you begin pounding the desk and whispering things under your breath you don't want anyone to hear.

A grocery store supervisor checks the shelves and notices products are in the wrong place. He finds the worker responsible for the error and begins shouting at him for making mistakes. The worker lunges at his boss with a punch. Both fall and sustain minor injuries.

A salesman is called in to a special meeting in which his boss chews him out for low sales. His temper rises but he manages to remain composed—until he gets back to his desk. At that point he rips to shreds most of his papers and pushes everything off his desk in anger. Now he feels even more stressed because his desk is in ruins and he has torn up needed papers.

The work environment has become a place of unleashed rage for too many Americans. This behavior is something the media has dubbed "desk rage." That's right, you've heard of road rage and air rage; now we have to contend with desk rage.

From a psychological perspective, desk rage is simply rudeness, hostility, physical violence and aggression found in the workplace. A National Crime Victimization Survey (2000) found that Americans experienced approximately 2 million threats of violence and assaults at their workplace. Of that number, 1.5 million were simple assaults.

Another study from the University of North Carolina documented that half the workers interviewed worried about rude and hostile behavior directed at them. Their concern affected their productivity. Overall, revenue related to lost productivity, increased security, insurance-related payments, and other expenses is estimated to cost employers between \$6.4 billion and \$36 billion.

Why are so many Americans going postal? It appears that desk rage is triggered by stress—boredom, anxiety, lack of control, demands of the job, overcrowding, noise and so on. Employers are trying to deal with the problem by finding solutions that decrease stress, such as more flexible work hours or improved benefits, but these aren't enough.

People have to learn anger management, ways to assert themselves positively and constructive ways to handle their negative emotions. In a nutshell, people need stress management. Try these tips from my Breaking Free From Stress booklet:

Be ready and accepting of change. Change is inevitable in today's work environment. Be ready for it instead of resisting it. Accept what you can't change.

Don't panic if you are laid off. With corporate downsizing, global market changes, outsourcing and so on, people lose their jobs even when they do well at them. Remember, God is your provider.

Explore fields that are growing. Skill development makes you more marketable. If you haven't already done so, get a quality education.

Be a good steward of your finances. Don't spend beyond your means or rack up credit-card debt. Put money away for a difficult time.

Maximize your work time. Be clear on what is expected so you

know how you will be evaluated. Minimize distractions.

Have integrity on the job. Do not compromise your beliefs, and line up your behavior according to biblical directives.

Be balanced. Have a life after work that involves relaxation, family, friends and a vibrant spiritual walk. Don't let go of your sense of humor. It relieves stress.

Don't easily take offense. People in the workplace won't always behave properly. Offer forgiveness even when it isn't requested. You be the model of Christ! Your influence could make a difference.

If you need additional help, pick up a copy of *Breaking Free From Anger and Unforgiveness*. Stress will never disappear, but our reaction to it can be godly.