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## **Wellness and Stress Management for Service Industry Employees**

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## Abstract

The following is a professional and educational experiment project designed to highlight the importance of wellness and self care for service industry employees. This project is an experiment to see what tools we can implement as service industry employees to reduce stress levels and take better care of ourselves, together. I used my own place of work (small town mom and pop business) and encouraged employees to participate in my case study as a means to address their own wellbeing, establish stress reduction techniques, make a positive change within our company's culture, and create a more supportive work environment. Below I will describe the process of establishing a wellness system and innovative resources for employees to utilize to improve overall well being and performance.

*Keywords:* stress, stress reduction, wellness, supportive environment

My project is centered around wellness activities and stress reduction techniques to help reduce levels of stress service industry workers endure on a day to day basis. For

many of us in the hospitality or service industry, the job requires us to put other people's needs ahead of our own. We spend many long hours on our feet, in a high stress, pressure filled environment, with little or no breaks. Because of this, we are highly susceptible to that dreaded feeling of "burn out". It's the nature of the job to indulge in alcohol (because it's readily available) and keep socializing. I was inspired to do this wellness project because as a service industry employee myself, I've noticed the habits and coping mechanisms we tend to pick up on in this particular industry are not sustainable nor beneficial for our overall well being or work performance. According to a study conducted by SAMHSA, the food industry has one of the highest rates of substance abuse, only coming in second place to construction workers (Bush & Lipari, 2015).

This project is focused on learning new tools to utilize in times of stress, create better habits and coping mechanisms, take care of ourselves inside and out, and find support within each other and within our busy fast paced profession. I wanted employees to challenge their old ways and patterns by stepping into new ones. I wanted to be a leader and cultivator of positive change amongst my team, and for myself. Participants were asked/encouraged to attend wellness courses such as yoga/meditations classes, art therapy classes (painting, drawing), and/or practice exercising in their own time, outside of the schedule I organized. The benefits of such activities have been widely recognized to contribute to an increase in focus, increase endorphins released in the brain, boost self-esteem, improve confidence, increase energy levels, and decrease symptoms of depression and "fight or flight" anxiety (*Exercise and Stress: Get Moving to Manage Stress*, 2022).

I networked with multiple other service industry employees I work alongside and discovered an individual with a masters degree in art therapy, and another individual that is a certified yoga instructor. I innovatively organized with both of these people to create a wellness plan that spanned over a month's time for employees to utilize as they wish, free of charge. The goal of this would be to give employees different resources and outlets for stress management techniques and incentivise new habits. I made it clear that in order to be a stakeholder and participant in this project, individuals would have to attend a class a minimum of three times. I would be a participant myself, and I created a spreadsheet to measure how many individuals /employees were in attendance each class. Yoga/meditation techniques were offered in the mornings Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for two weeks. Art therapy/meditation was held on two Sunday evenings. Employees were encouraged to hit the gym or get outside and exercise in their own spare time outside of the classes I scheduled. They were instructed to let me know when they did, so again, I could keep a tally of who is participating in this wellness journey, and how frequently. In total, there were nine participants or stakeholders, including myself, and the instructors.

After creating the calendar spreadsheet (see photo below), and documenting which individuals participated the most in each of the classes, I spoke with each person and asked for a review in order to understand if this project had any impact on them, the stakeholders. I had individuals review and reflect upon how they are feeling now compared to how they felt a few weeks ago (when we weren't practicing wellness together as a staff), what aspects of the courses they found the most useful, what class they preferred (yoga, meditation, exercise on their own, or art therapy), what their overall

takeaways and feedback is, and how, if at all, they have been implementing the coping tools learned, while at work.

The results show the four participants who practiced yoga, meditation and exercised on their own time the most, were the ones who reported more joy and happiness in and outside the workplace. There were reports of sleeping better, and increased positive feelings about one's self. Four reported using breathing exercises they had learned in the meditation class throughout the work day in moments of stress. One reported drawing to quiet yoga music in the evenings to wind down and relax. Both the instructors said they felt more in control and calm while at work just from practicing and teaching what they know about wellness outside of work. Two others reported being neutral and not noticing much difference in the way they feel, or in how they manage at work, yet they still enjoyed participating in wellness activities with other members from the restaurant outside of work, and would like the option to do more of it in the future.

. If anything, I think this project experiment overall taught stakeholders unique ways to handle and let go of stress outside of work, so they are better able to handle it in the moment the next time at work. Yoga has been the most popular class for employees, based on the attendance results and stakeholder feedback. Yoga philosophy and meditation is full of ancient wisdom and powerful tools that can be incorporated into the workplace. A 2019 study has shown that “yoga practitioners and non-practitioners of yoga significantly differ in emotional intelligence. Yoga practitioners are found to have a much better emotional intelligence level than the non-practitioners, irrespective of the duration and frequency of yoga practice” (*Indian Association of Health, Research and Welfare*). The consensus amongst my employees is that we all want yoga practices to

continue. The benefits of practicing have helped employees with their attitudes and performance towards work. Not only is yoga a way to promote team bonding within our company's culture, it helps "strengthen our muscles of awareness and choice- it trains our minds and changes our attitudes" (Kumar, 2007).

The yoga instructor has agreed to continue hosting practices for our employees free of charge simply because she finds enjoyment and peace when doing so. She wants to continue growing as a yoga teacher and her goal is one day to do it fulltime and make her way out of the service industry herself. I had not anticipated yoga being the most influential for the stakeholders. I thought for sure most people would like the art painting and drawing classes more. But since yoga was the most popular, I am glad we can continue to offer this as a resource for employees to lean on. Art meditation can be done individually, at home, now that we've been shown the technique. I'm happy to announce our performance at work and our attitudes have seen positive results from applying stress reduction techniques into our daily actions. Stakeholders found these meditation and wellness classes to be a form of team bonding and self help.

This project required a lot of input, organization, creative thought, dedication, self discipline, and time management on not only my end, but on my stakeholders' ends as well. If I could do anything different, it would be to have held even more yoga practices- and have them at our place of work. Maybe this summer we will hold practice at work outside on the back patio. I would have also liked to pay the instructors for their time, and even compensate stakeholders for participating too. That is something I plan on discussing with the owners of the restaurant after the holidays. Maybe after they hear the

feedback of how well their staff is doing, in part, because of yoga, they will allow employees to clock in before practicing.

At the end of the day though, I was able to grow into a new position of leadership by inspiring and influencing a positive change within our service culture. I am pleased with the results and feedback I received from stakeholders and I am very proud of all the employees for joining me on this experiment. I think it's safe to say we all learned a little something about the importance of wellness, self care, stress reduction and management techniques, and in turn, ways to achieve a supportive team environment within our industry.

Stress Management

MONTH: October/November YEAR: \_\_\_\_\_

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Yoga 9am JS, JH, ST, SE HR 5		Yoga 9am JS, JH, HR, KK 4		Yoga 9am JS, JH, ST, OR KK 5		
Yoga 9am JS, JH, OR, HR KK, JN 6	(Any day) Outside exercise: ST, JS, JF, ST JF, OR 4	Yoga 9am JS, JH, OR, SE KK, JN, JT 7		Yoga 9am JS, JH, OR, KK JN 5		Art Therapy 8pm: JS, JF, SE, ST JN 5
						Art Therapy 8pm: JS, JF, SE, JH 4
ST: IIII JF: IIII	JH: IIII SE: IIII	OR: IIII JN: IIII	HR: IIII KK: IIII	JS(me): IIII IIII		

(Tally marks by initials are how many times a stakeholder participated in an activity over the course of the project. Numbers measure how many people attended an activity. I originally had photos of stakeholders art pieces and photos of us in yoga, but my phone recently broke and I lost every photo from the last 4 years.)



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