

Arts & Entertainment

Is The Office Like Your Office?

MET prof offers advice on managing workplace stress

08.01.2007

By Vicky Waltz



Thierry Guedj (GRS'01), associate director of the BU Faculty and Staff Assistance Office. Photo by Kalman Zabarsky

The typical American works more than 40 hours a week, spends an additional 60 minutes a day commuting, and often does more work on a laptop or a BlackBerry evenings and weekends. It all adds up to a minimum of 2,080 work-related hours each year — all of which results in Americans spending more time working than doing anything else.

It's no wonder that work is a leading contributor to stress and anxiety, says Thierry Guedj (GRS'01), associate director of the [Boston University Faculty and Staff Assistance Office](#) (FSAO), a free counseling service for University staff and faculty and their families. It began two decades ago as a resource center for dealing with substance abuse, but over the years it has become more clinically focused. Today, the FSAO deals primarily with work-related issues, or what Guedj calls “the psychology of work.”

BU Today recently talked with Guedj, who is also an adjunct assistant professor and chair of Metropolitan College's psychology department, to find out what triggers workplace stress, and what people can do about it.

***BU Today:* What do you mean by the psychology of work?**

Guedj: The psychology of work is anything that has to do with the interaction between an individual, the work environment, and the factors that influence individuals and the groups they are a part of. You can look at it from the angle of trying to adjust to a new position or from the question of how people manage stress and deadlines. It can also be looked at from the angle of managing relationships

within the work environment or how leadership influences both the atmosphere and the productivity of a work environment.

What workplace issues do you most frequently encounter?

Typically, when patients come to our office, the first words out of their mouths are: I'm really stressed out. Stress is a very serious matter, because if it becomes chronic, it can trigger high levels of anxiety and depression, which can lead to serious health problems, such as cardiovascular complications.

What are the typical causes of work-related stress?

Trying to get along with others in the work group can be difficult, and when relationships are frayed, stress levels are incredibly high. Sometimes people experience stress because there's a complete mismatch between what they thought a position would be and what a position actually is. We see a lot of anxious managers who have never given employees feedback about their performances, and they're stressed over delivering evaluations.

How do you treat patients who are suffering from work-related stress?

Primarily, we help people find better strategies to deal with conflicted situations. For example, there are more politically savvy ways of handling differences than shouting or slamming doors. For people who are struggling with professional demands, we might help them assess what they're good at and try to redirect their interests. We also help people work through their anger or disappointment when they perceive there has been an injustice in the workplace or feel they've been passed over for a promotion. We talk about ways to move on. Additionally, we coach people on how to have difficult conversations. We see a lot of patients during performance evaluations, and we've coached a number of managers about how to go through the process. We also respond to emergencies and do crisis debriefings. We run some retreats and team-building exercises, and we do everything we can to make BU a better workplace. We want people to be happy working here.

How confidential is the office?

Confidentiality is almost absolute, with a few exceptions — for example, cases that involve child or elderly abuse. As mental health professionals, we are mandated by law to report such cases. We also have a duty to contact the authorities if patients tell us they are going to harm a specific person.

Does the office focus on long-term care?

We operate only on a short-term model. We have an extensive referral network, so when patients are dealing with long-term issues, we refer them to an outside source. If the situation involves a workplace issue, there's a bigger tendency to keep it in-house, but if it's a straight mental health issue, we generally refer those patients elsewhere.

The Faculty and Staff Assistance Office, located at 270 Bay State Road, B-30, is open Monday through Friday, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. The office offers free confidential counseling and referral services to faculty and staff and their families. Call 617-353-5381 to schedule an appointment. Vicky Waltz can be reached at vwaltz@bu.edu.

Share

Twitter

Facebook

Email

Print

Today

Univers

Class U

Nightlif

BU Tod



Related

classes

faculty

local

student |

study tip

Editor's Picks



Sports

Terriers' New Softball Head Coach



Science & Tech

Molecule Makers



Campus Life + Health & Wellness

Help When Needed: Faculty & Staff Assistance Office



In the World

Don't Call It Cream

Explore Stories

.....
[Browse Archives](#)
.....

[Explore Topics \(Tags\)](#)
.....

[Explore Series](#)
.....

About + Contact

.....
[About BU Today](#)
.....

[Subscribe to Newsletter](#)
.....

[Contact Us](#)
.....

Follow Us

.....
[Twitter](#)
.....

[Facebook](#)
.....

[RSS](#)
.....

© 2015 Boston University