

# TIP SHEET

## WORKLOAD - COPING WITH A GROWING WORKLOAD

After change, excessive workload is the culprit that causes stress in the workplace for most people. A growing workload is also exacerbated by the dynamic changes in technology, that seemingly were meant to make our working lives easier, but which in fact, have placed pressure on us to do more in less time. Paperwork that needs to be read piles up, the inbox is so full of unanswered emails it is on the verge of exploding, you have so many irons in the fire that you feel your main occupation is juggling, the excessive meetings prevent you from getting to your desk, your boss throws another task your way, the phone rings nonstop, and all of a sudden you feel like you will implode. Below are some tips on how to manage a growing workload.

1. Be realistic and say 'No'. It is better to be honest about what is achievable given the resources, especially if there are deadlines.
2. Delegate if you can, as you cannot do everything or verify everything. Don't micromanage.
3. Prioritise your work. This makes it easier to delegate, plan and reach deadlines.
4. It may be temporary. Many workplaces have their busy times and workloads do increase. But they decrease too. Be aware of this, monitor the workload, communicate it to others who are in your life and will be affected by it, such as your family, and say something if it is causing you stress.
5. Be aware of your own emotional changes when you are stressed, such as increasing impatience, irritability, snapping at others, being short tempered, being oversensitive, filtering everything with the one filter, being emotional rather than rational, retreating into yourself and so forth. Don't take it out on others or dump on your family!
6. For managers, think about how you can support your employees better during times of a growing workload, acknowledge their work and reward them. No one likes the feeling of 'being taken for granted'. If you value the employee, hang onto them. Recruiting and training new employees is costly.
7. Learn to manage technology rather than allow it to manage you. Write a permanent message on your email that informs clients and work colleagues that you will get to their email within a time frame – not immediately; turn on your phone only in designated hours; have a strong filter for callers; check emails at a specified number of times during the day not every minute.
8. When organising your schedule allocate time for actual work that you need to get out to customers, team members, etc.
9. Work overload comes from feeling out of control because you have a number of demands competing for your attention. Keeping a tidy office, desk and house can actually help you feel in control as it is organised!
10. Feeling out of control is very stressful for people, so sharing control in a situation can alleviate stress enormously. Empower the teams at work. This will allow for decision making to occur at different levels of an organisation.
11. If you are struggling, communicate it with the appropriate people. Resigning is one option, but if everything else is ok, then it is reactionary. If nothing changes, look for another job.
12. If you are a manager, monitor workloads and have realistic expectations of employees.
13. New clients, case work or client work can be thrust upon us without any preparation. Preparation is one of the key strategies to alleviate stress. To manage this, communicate the changes in workload as soon as possible so that employees have time to adjust psychologically to the changes in workload.
14. If the growing workload is getting out of hand, document it so that when you do talk to your manager about it, you have something concrete to discuss. It is easier to delete or delegate a task and convince the manager to provide more resources if there are identified tasks.
15. There will be some things that you can let go when your workload is growing. Ask yourself if this task is essential to your business. If it is not, let it go.
16. If your boss is difficult for any number of reasons (a bully, a control freak, absent often) and you don't know what to do, refer to the tip sheet *Dealing with a Difficult Boss* for some tips. Keep in mind that it can apply equally to difficult work colleagues!
17. It's a growing workload, not a serious accident or illness! Reminding yourself of this can help to keep things in perspective!