

## **Breaking the Conflict–Stress–Wellness Cycle: Effective Strategies to Protect Your Health at Work and at Home**

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### **Session Summary**

Relational conflicts at work and home are a significant source of stress. If left unaddressed, stress and resulting conflicts can cause serious mental health problems for employees. It also puts a significant financial burden for companies, industries, and governments due to drastic drops in productivity, innovation and engagement and spike in turnover and various costs. Coupled with a difficult deadline at work or a child's upcoming science project, it is no surprise that 77% of people feel chronically stressed and 85% of employees deal with conflict at work. As people plan to return to the office, we will be facing a disruption of both old and newly established routines, and the level of conflict we may experience in the workplace is expected to increase. Coupled with companies looking to get more done with fewer workers, the stress of everyday work tasks can start to introduce opportunities for miscommunication, resentment, and discord. The powerful conflict-stress-wellness loop is important to understand to be able to both protect your well-being at work and to build resilience, reclaim energy, and create psychological safety at work and at home, so that stress can be managed before it hijacks our performance, work, health and life.

This session will focus on the link between conflict/stress and physical and mental wellness and how employees can manage the connection to enhance their well-being and boost their creativity, energy, vitality, personal connection, collaboration, engagement and fulfillment. Through real-world cases, attendees will learn to recognize disruptive patterns of the conflict-stress-wellness loop, recognize their level of comfort with uncertainty and relational trust, and learn how to quickly de-escalate conflict and create a personal conflict well-being plan.

By the end of this session, attendees will have mastered how to:

- Recognize and instantly interrupt the destructive “act-now-think-later” knee-jerk response that ignites conflicts, stress and anxiety
- Leverage clarity to pinpoint the root cause of conflict and how to move past the issues to gain control, inner-peace and harmony.
- Identify the personal cost and innerconnection of unresolved work/home conflict and its powerful impact on their relationships, health, performance, wealth, lifestyle, and their overall well-being.
- Use powerful mind-hacks and communication strategies to reduce the impact of workplace conflict and enhance satisfaction, fulfillment, and collaboration.

## **Exploring the Connection between Workplace Conflict and Well Being**

Too often the corporate environment has become dehumanized. We are required to separate life from work and “check our emotions and personal problems” at the door. However, such compartmentalization of our personal and professional relationship is the greatest myth that is impossible to achieve, as we are wired to be connected and our evolutionary survival depends on this interconnectivity. The more we try to separate what is affecting us in our personal lives, the more we carry it over in our professional relationships, and visa versa. The reason lies in our evolutionally adaption that made psychological safety both fragile and vital to success in uncertain and interdependent environment.

The powerful "conflict-stress-wellness" loop that many of us experience – and that is often built into our work environments – stems deep from our body and mind, and has the power to spiral our lives, our relationships, our health and our careers out of control, just like our life conflicts spiral into defensiveness, reactivity and conflicts at work. As you do one thing, you do everything.

When we are not aware of this cycle and do not step into our personal leadership power to take control over it consciously and strategically, this can create chaos in life, health, relationships, and organizations. Taking it a step further, when the conflict-stress-wellness continuum is not in balance, corporations will experience disengagement, lack of fulfillment, over stressed, underappreciated workforces. Worldwide, only 15% of employees are engaged with their work, which inevitably threatens or diminishes the innovation, creativity, collaboration, and communication across all levels.

Time is Money. There are a variety of direct costs to the organization associated with poorly managed conflict, including, in the worst cases, the loss of customers and good employees. One that is visible to everyone is the time taken to successfully resolve issues. Time that would be better spent on accomplishing work and achieving goals.

It is in this space of conflict and stress that bullying and aggressive behaviors in the workplace and at home can be manifested, where 27% of employees have witnessed conflict morph into a personal attack, while 25% say that the avoidance of conflict resulted in sickness or absence from work. According to one study, U.S. employees spend 2.8 hours per week dealing with conflict, equating to estimated \$359 billion in paid hours. It is estimated that 120,000 people die every year as a direct result of work-related stress, as reported by the American Institute of Stress, while healthcare costs resulting from work-related stress totals an average of \$190 billion a year. Long-term stress is often a contributing factor in many of the leading causes of death in the United States, including heart disease, cancer, lung disease, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, addictions and suicide.

In some organizations, the situation is worse still as it is also a major drain on the resources of HR departments, with 51% of HR workers questioned spending between one and five hours a week managing disagreements.

On the other hand, when channeled through the right tools and expertise, conflict can lead to positive outcomes, such as a better understanding of others, improved solutions to problems or challenges, and major innovation.

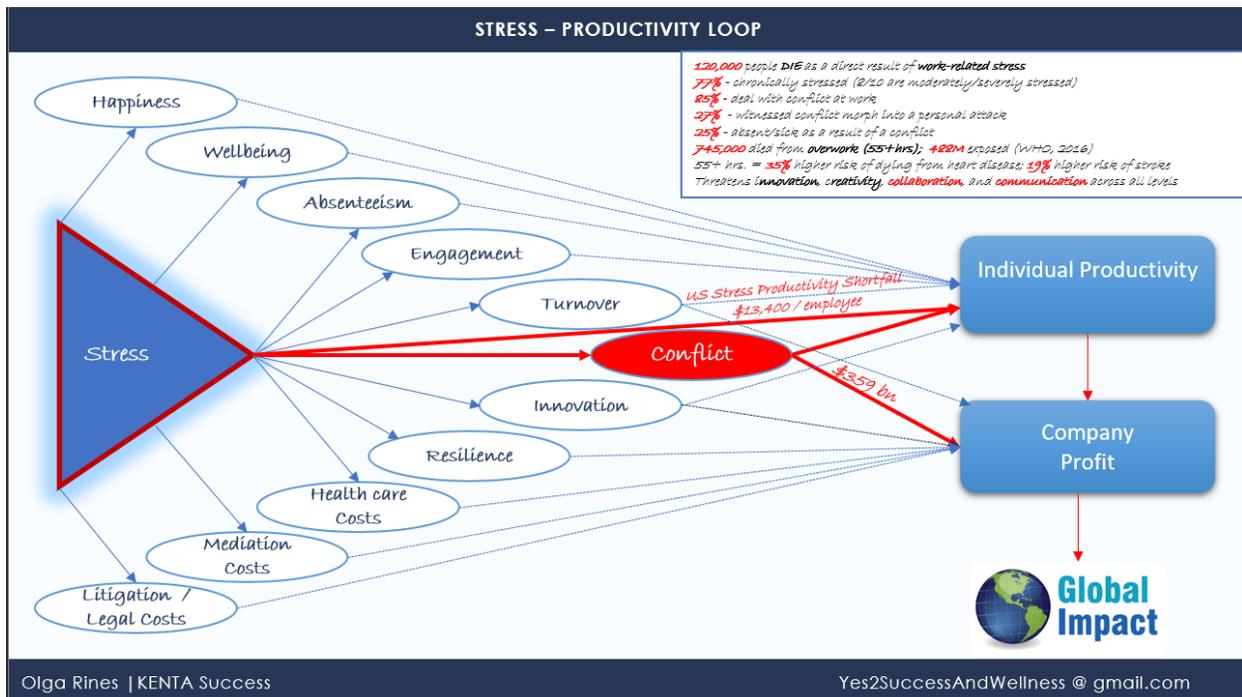


Figure 1: The Stress-Productivity Framework

## Using Stress as a Powerful Catalyst

The solution, as always, lies within us. Partnering with stress, mastering your mind-body connection, and building emotional resilience and high-performer mindset are powerful ways to stay focused and in control of the present and harness the energy from your emotions to move forward. For organizations, cultivating the “people-centered” culture and empathetic leadership is the key to fully leverage human capital as the most important asset and value.

Learning and mastering the formula of freedom from overwhelm will instantly allow you to take control over the situation, perceptions, and decisions that either fuel or remove anxiety and ignites or de-escalate any conflict – at work or at home. This also enables you to embrace/practice mindfulness and “broaden-and-build” emotional methodologies that will not only dramatically reduce the stress put on the body, but will also allow you to solve complex problems, foster collaboration, and build meaningful connections.

When you can master your miraculous inner technologies and build emotional resilience then you can use your mind to rewire your brain to stay calm in the midst of conflict and stressful situations. This also empowers you to replace your beliefs with those rooted in trust, confidence, curiosity and inspirations that brings joy, positivity, vitality and meaningful connections and fulfillment.

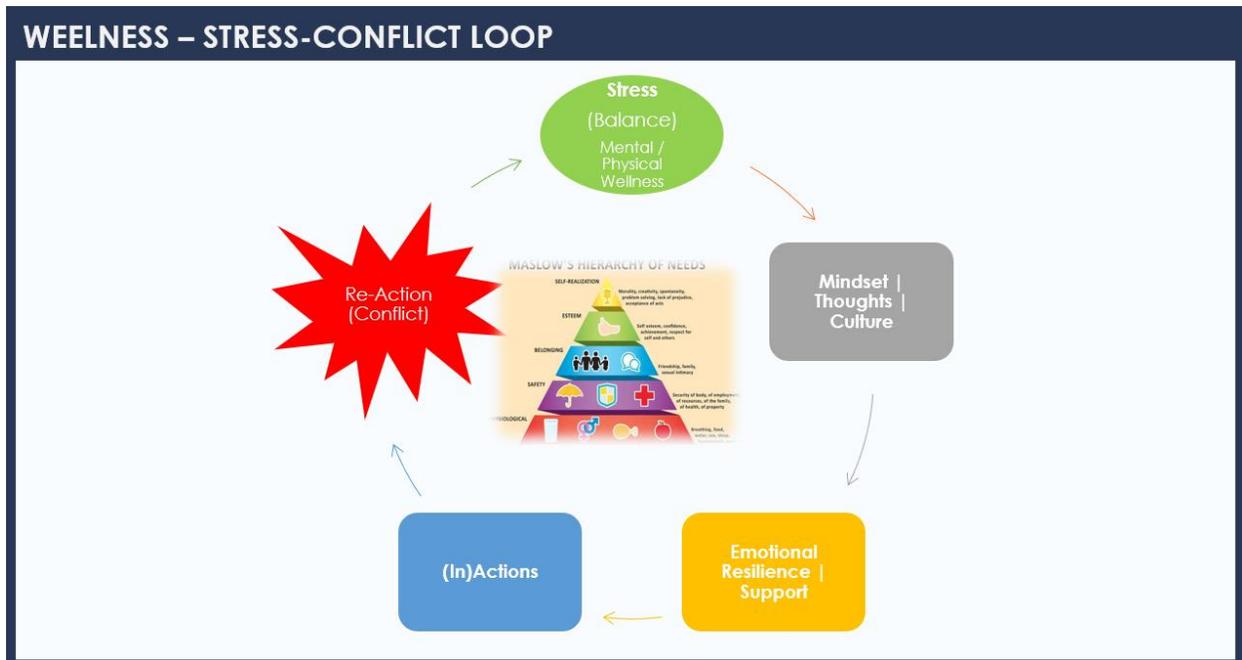


Figure 2: The Wellness – Stress – Conflict Loop

## 7-Point Stress Formula

Managing stress is as much of a balancing act as it is controlling your emotional response. On one side of the equation, there are the “problems” which include the stressors (that we must recognize and be aware that trigger you), the perceptions (that will require a mindset reframe), and the Big Shift (which is change, of any kind). That must be balanced with the “solutions” that encompass energy, resources (time, money, and support). Overwhelm happens when the problems outweigh the solutions that we have at our disposal. The goal is to always operate in a place of resource so that no matter what conflict arises, you have the tools, the time, the energy, and the support to overcome it without triggering an emotional or physiological response.

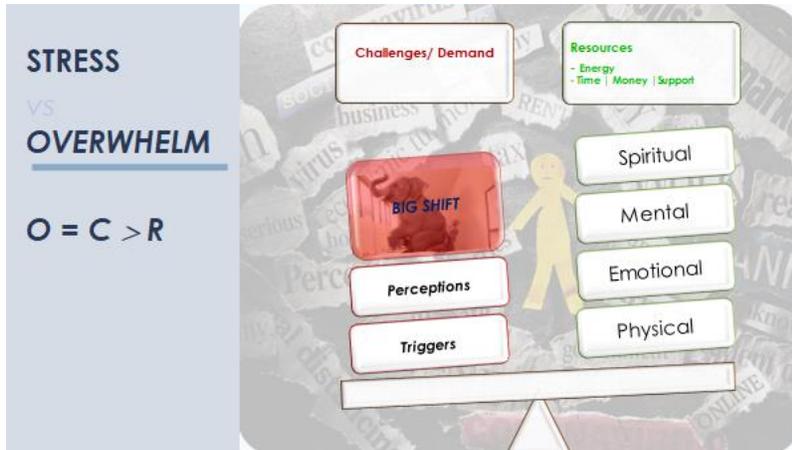


Figure 3: The 7-Point Stress Equation

### The Two Brain Model to Perception & Reactions

There are two brains which also come with two modes of reaction. When our amygdala is hijacked, we move into an aggressive, defensive and reactive mode that often leads us to act now and think later. However, what we want to establish is activate our rational brain and in turn have a rational response that enables us to reclaim our energy, so that we can remain calm. This will further empower us to make effective choices and communicate even when situations are tense or confrontational.



Figure 4: The Two Brain Model of Conflict Reaction

## Session Closing

The high-performing teams and happy healthy, connected and engaged people have two things in common – they have mastered their relationships with their body and mind so they can be in charge of their reactions, stress and energy. They also focus on communication and mindful connection with their social and physical environment, so they feel resilient, safe, confident and in control to powerfully handle challenging situations while also creating ripple effects of positive impact in all areas of their lives. It is by seeking to stay in a place of high resource and personal leadership that employees can navigate conflict with calm, flow, and effective communication.

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