

THE GINGERBREAD MAN FIELDBOOK ARTICLE

Workplace Stress

Surveys consistently find a high percentage of people experience a significant or extreme amount of stress at work.

- 40% of workers report their job is “very or extremely stressful” according to a survey by Northwestern National Life
- 26% of workers report they are “often or very often burned out” by their work according to a survey by the Families and Work Institute
- 29% of workers report they feel “quite a bit or extremely stressed at work” according to a survey by Yale University
- Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than any of the other life stressors such as financial or family problems according to St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company.

Studies are increasingly establishing a link between job stress and an individual’s health.

- A study of 46,000 workers by Minnesota health management company StayWell found that stress was the most costly risk-factor in companies’ healthcare expenditures when compared to other issues such as smoking, overweight, high-blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.
- A study by the British Medical Journal linked chronic stress to the development of heart disease and type 2 diabetes, based on the effects of stress-related hormones and coping mechanisms such as overeating.
- A study by the University of Rochester School Medicine demonstrated a clear relationship between long-term stress and an increase in the body mass index (BMI) of participants.
- A study by the MEDSAT group found that health costs increased by 46% among high stress employees.

Government, healthcare organizations and medical professionals consider balance between work and personal life, along with personal pursuits, hobbies and interests to be an effective strategy to offset stress.

- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health reports that a balance between work and family life, a support network or friends and family and a relaxed and positive attitude reduce the effects of stressful working conditions.
- In a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers at New York University reported findings that crafts and hobbies have the ability to de-stress, reducing blood pressure and heart rate.
- Doctors at the Mayo Clinic recommend pursuing an active hobby such as music or other creative endeavors to provide stress relief and provide a sense of accomplishment.
- Mind/body experts at Harvard University have pointed that many crafts and hobbies include the types of repetitive and rhythmic actions that are shown to relax the mind, reduce heart rate and reduce stress.

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It's clear we can reduce the stress we encounter in the workplace through the pursuit of crafts, hobbies and other leisure activities. But what if we could integrate our favorite craft, hobby or leisure activity into our work? What if an aspect of one of these interests became our job, or part of our job?

The Japanese word "ikigai" means "that which gives life a sense of purpose." It's often used to describe caring for another life such as gardening or raising a pet. For many of us our true ikigai is a personal activity or passion such as woodworking, paper craft, a music instrument or other pursuit. These interests free us from our own problems and provide a broader perspective on life.

Perhaps the truest form of ikigai then is to fuse our hobbies and our work. This logical conclusion would permanently remove or resolve the problem of chronic stress in our lives. If we can achieve better health by pursuing our hobbies outside of work, imagine the healthy lifestyle we can achieve if our hobbies are our work.