

## APA Solutions: Self-Awareness and Stress



As an organization, we are committed to helping any willing participant achieve a higher sense of self-awareness as a gateway for choice and control. If one's thoughts and feelings are operating outside of awareness, then they are in control. If one wants to control them, the first thing is to open up a window of awareness as an opportunity to pause and consider, before choosing, deciding and acting.

With 2020 quickly approaching and the recognition that self-awareness is a vital skill that can be continually developed our team was incredibly interested how self-aware individuals were about their personal threshold for stress and the far-reaching implications within the workplace.

## Overview

Stress is an important resource that, when used appropriately and with optimal levels, can be incredibly beneficial. However, every individual perceives a situation and stress differently. That is, something that alleviates one person's stress level may cause an increase in someone else's stress level. Some people are better able to cope than others, and some people are not impacted by it as severely as others. When we experience stress, we see a rise of cortisol (aka "the stress hormone") in the bloodstream. Neurologically, that increase in cortisol correlates with circuitry in our brain dedicated to higher level thinking actually turning off in order to accommodate our primal fight-or-flight instincts. As a result, we have an individual unable to effectively make decisions, control their impulses, regulate their emotions and this fight-or-flight thought process is not one we are able to override. This is not the position we want to find ourselves in at work, where making decisions is what we spend the majority of our day doing. In addition to not being able to effectively make decisions when under stress, stress also has lasting, chronic effects on our health. These effects include lower-quality or less sleep, lower cognitive function, and a whole slew of health issues like depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular problems (to name a few).

Due to chronic stress in the workplace, we are seeing record levels of absenteeism and disengagement. A single stressful, five-minute exchange can result in potential days of ineffective work. For example: Say you have an annual performance review with your boss. You walk into the meeting confident that you've spent the last year effectively doing your job and even exceeding expectations. You have great relationships with your team members and have been consistently hitting all your targets. However, your boss fails to acknowledge all of the things you've done right and only focus on what you've done wrong or could improve moving

forward. You leave the review feeling confused, frustrated, undervalued, and stressed. This stress is now something you carry with you for the rest of the year until your next performance review and impacts the way you communicate with not only your boss, but also your team members. Because the brain functions like a computer, we download the information about that experience and carry it with us into all our future interactions with the people around us. If this happens enough times with enough people, it promotes a culture of fear, and that stressful experience becomes the benchmark to which we compare all future social exchanges.

Clearly, the impact of stress on personal well-being and work-place effectiveness has arguably become an area of great interest. At APA Solutions, we were interested in evaluating how effective stress awareness training can be on improving how cognizant individuals are of stress and the impact it can have in a person's life. We compared the results of a previous survey asking participants (77) to identify the impact of stress on various elements of their work with individuals' awareness of the impact of stress within those who completed the stress awareness training (23). In general, the survey results suggest an increase in awareness of stress and the impact it has on cognitive functioning and emotion regulation.

## Results

The 23 individuals who completed the survey after successfully finishing the stress awareness training and the corresponding TTI Stress Quotient assessment were more likely to respond with 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to questions regarding recognition of stress symptoms and decision-making abilities (see Figures 1 & 2).

Q5 Are you now able to recognize the symptoms of stress in your own behavior?

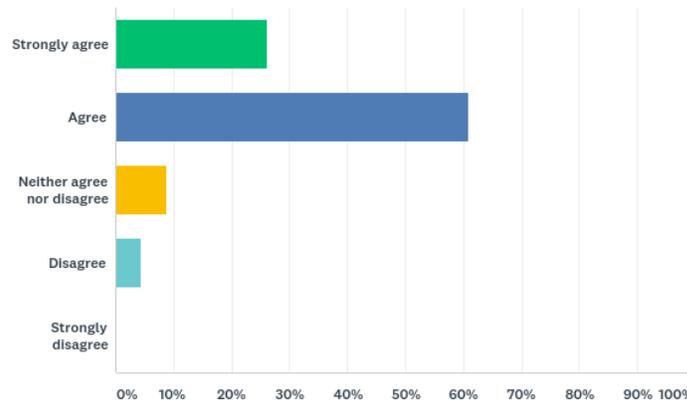


Figure 1 – Results from question regarding recognition of stress symptoms from individuals who completed the stress awareness workshop.

Q7 Do you feel stress adversely affects your decision making abilities?

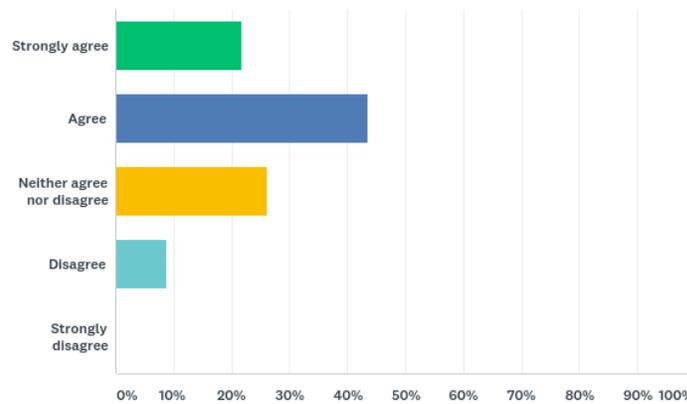


Figure 2 – Results from question regarding decision making abilities when stressed from individuals who completed the stress awareness workshop.

When these results were compared to a previous survey conducted on self-awareness, the findings were quite different. Most participants in this previous survey, who had not completed

any training on stress or self-awareness prior to completing this questionnaire, were like to respond with ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ that stress affect solving workplace problems and nearly half of respondents claimed that emotions (stress) does not impact judgements made at work (see Figured 3 & 4).

Q3 When I am stressed, I have a hard time solving workplace problems.

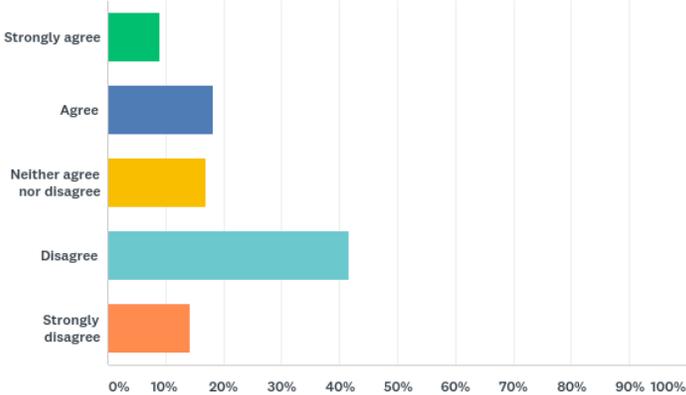


Figure 3 – Results from question regarding solving workplace problems when stressed from individuals who had not completed stress or self-awareness training.

### Q9 I feel my emotions cloud my judgment at work.

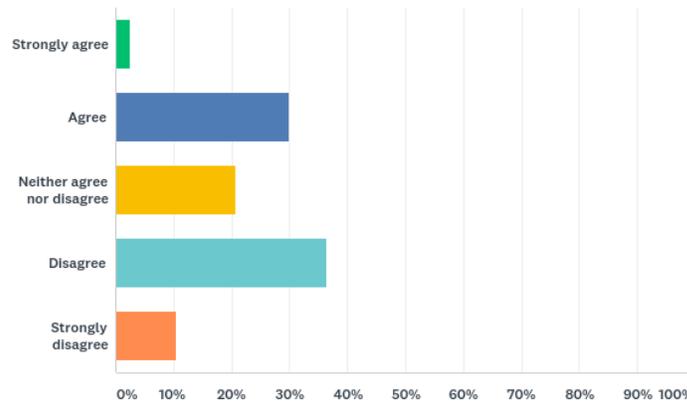


Figure 4 – Results from question regarding emotions affect workplace judgment from individuals who had not completed stress or self-awareness training.

### Conclusions

Descriptively, these results would suggest a primary benefit of completing the stress assessment training along with the TTI Stress Quotient measurement was an increase in awareness of stress and an increased awareness of the impact on decision-making and other symptoms.

One limitation of this study and its conclusions stems from questions that are worded differently, so there is always the uncertainty of participants equally interpreted these questions. However, given the similar topic each question is polling relative to the drastically different responses, it can be argued the training had an impact related to self-awareness of stress symptoms and the effect on decision-making abilities. Additionally, the sample size between the two surveys is different and the descriptive results from this analysis need to be interpreted with caution. However, with these sample size differences considered, the general findings between

these sets of questions would suggest an impact of the stress awareness training on those who participated in the workshop.

### Observations/ Suggestions

Leaders with higher levels of emotional intelligence know their limits and adjust accordingly giving them a competitive advantage in an agile economy. People who have focused on this form of intellect are better communicators, build stronger relationships, have higher empathy levels, reduce conflict and have lower levels of stress and anxiety. It's for that reason that we will maintain a huge commitment to our workshop sessions covering research-based topics that are shown to improve your self-awareness through our proprietary brain-based methodology. Each two-hour class is scientifically broken down into bite-sized pieces to maximize growth and designed to create a more effective you. Build on your leadership competencies by participating in our EQ webinar or in person workshops [HERE](#).