

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

STRESS MANAGEMENT THROUGH HYPNOSIS



A LEARNING CONTRACT
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MODULE I

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Stress Management Through Hypnosis

Introduction:

Evidence is mounting that people working in correctional facilities experience a significant amount of stress in their jobs, which may lead to high job turnover, a high rate of sick leave, and troubled relations with inmates, other staff, and family members. This paper looks at the stress experienced by correctional workers and the utilization of progressive relaxation training through hypnosis as a means of dealing with stress.

The classification of stress:

¹The term "stress" is used in everyday speech in a multitude of ways and by a variety of professional and lay people. It is likely that in each instance the speaker is describing a different phenomenon, a different stress. Stress can operationally be defined as an unpleasant awareness of one's internal or external environment. In the case of work stress, it is the unpleasant awareness experienced at work, or when anticipating going to work, or when reflecting on work. The concept of stress has several dimensions, one of which is its duration, as perceived by the actor. Three types of stress can be distinguished: short-term acute stress: stress of a time-bound event: and long-term stress.

Short-term acute stress is stress in response to a situation of overt, immediate, unexpected danger-- an

explosion, an attack, or riot. There tends to be a distinct beginning and end to this stress, though the repercussions of an event may continue to linger on and bother the individual. In this case, however, the stress reaction is not "triggered" by an ongoing relationship with a particular environment.

Time-bound, stressful events or predictable, yet stressful situations form second type of stress. This variety of stress is best exemplified by the stress people regularly experience at examinations, performances, income tax time, and is commonly referred to as, "time-bound" stress. Time-bound stress can usually be anticipated, and ceases after the passage of the stressful event.

Long-term stress is a final form of stress. With long-term stress, the actor sees no promise of stress and the stressful situation diminishing over time. In this instance, the stress an individual experiences is often linked with the inability, real or perceived, of escape from the stressful situation.

In dealing with a corrections employee who is suffering from long-term stress, it is reasonable to expect that stress will stem from one of four area's: stress linked with the inmate population, harassing inmates at the facility, the experience of violence, or the threat of violence. Stress from co-workers, competition for choice slots and assignments, personality clashes, fear they will not be

backed or protected by their co-workers, belief that they are being excluded. The third area is stress created by superiors, pressure designed to force them to resign or ask to transfer, changes of assignments from low duration contact to high duration contact with dangerous inmates, and no support in dealing with public problems, with visitors, protesters, or press.

Correctional employees are programmed to accept long-term stress and pride themselves on their willingness and ability to tolerate it. People tend to tolerate long-term stress as long as they positively value the activity and its outcome. At some point, however, long-term stress becomes burnout, as the benefits derived from the activity fall far below the cost on a continuous basis.

Burnout is a condition that is seen in many human activities. It is a sustained and negative change in the perception of the value, desirability or need to attain a goal or the worth of a person or the significance of a relationship or some state of being. It is first experienced as a decline in satisfaction, a change in the ratio of preferred effort to positive emotional return. Corrections employees, if experiencing this, will be disillusioned. They will become angry if they feel cheated or depressed if they feel that they acted foolishly by believing that a job was worthwhile, when it was not.

In the past an employee suffering from long-term stress

was traditionally dealt with by one of several methods. The employee might be placed on a rotation schedule where his duties and co-workers would vary from time to time. This approach was an attempt to eliminate boredom and/or conflict with fellow employees. Employees also have been encouraged to participate in additional employee training courses to further their education and to decrease their frustration. Finally, employers have initiated job enrichment programs designed to increase productivity incentives. Finally and as a last resort, employees have been forced to leave or to accept transfer to another area where the employee could function with the least amount of conflict.

Long-term stress and hypnosis:

The traditional methods appear to be some what effective as a preventive approach to the elimination of the behavioral symptoms of stress, but they are limited largely to work oriented stress and seldom seek to determine whether the employee is suffering from long-term stress. Although long-term stress may be reflected in an employees performance, it may have originated from outside sources, such as a dissatisfied spouse or financial problems.

In the quest for suitable methods for addressing long-term stress, a variety of solutions have been put forward. Each of these solutions seeks permanent and continuous answers for the burden of long-term stress.

²Progressive relaxation through hypnosis has proven to be an

effective way to deal with all types of stress, as well as phobias and anxiety disorders arising from long-term stress.

Regular sessions with the employee, along with group sessions held twice a month with members of the department appears to be a much more effective way to deal with stress.

Many of the employees of the Erath County Sheriff's Department have taken advantage of progressive relaxation through hypnosis. Most of the employees who have requested hypnosis have done so with a particular problem in mind, such as weight loss, or to stop smoking. Much of the time, these particular problems are behavioral symptoms of stress. Erath County Sheriff's Department personnel have exhibited patterns commonly found in the use of progressive relaxation through hypnosis. The value of hypnosis has been demonstrated through its sustained control of fundamental stress factors.

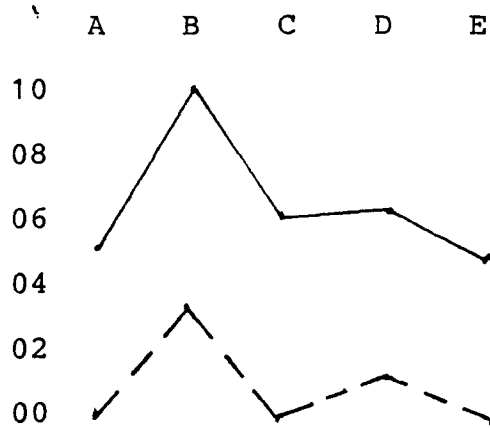
The case studies that follow demonstrate the successful application of progressive relaxation technique in Erath County. While not statistically generalizable, these cases mirror the findings reported in other instances of the use of hypnosis to deal with long-term fundamental stress.

Case Studies:

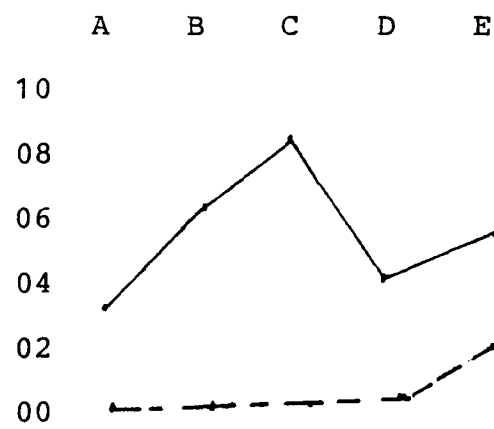
Case were done on twenty employees of the Erath County Sheriff's Department. Each study indicated a variety of topics ranging from sick leave taken, to written warnings. An example of results on four employees are noted in Fig. 1.

FIGURE 1 - PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PRE AND POST HYPNOSIS.

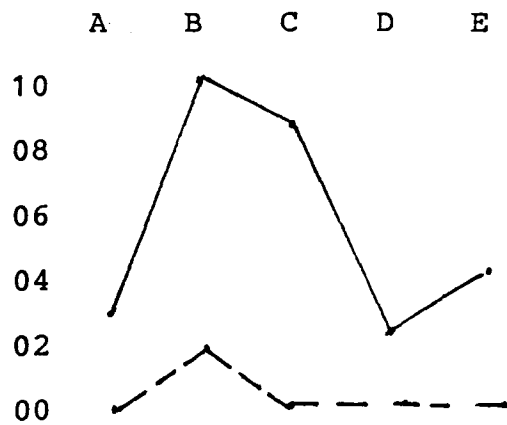
Subject 1:



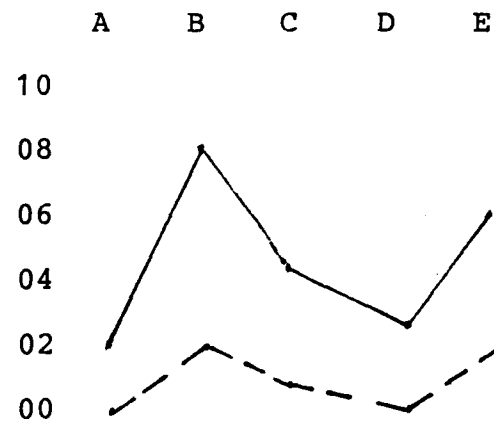
Subject 2:



Subject 3:



Subject 4:



- A. No. of written warnings.
 B. No. of sick days taken.
 C. No. of times late to work.
 D. No. of complaints from fellow workers.
 E. No. of complaints from inmates.

Solid line indicates pre-hypnosis.

Broken line indicates post-hypnosis.

The Hypnosis Process:

³The first step the hypnotist must take when working with an employee is to eliminate any misconception of hypnosis and build rapport with the subject by explaining hypnosis in simple, easily understood terms. One extremely effective method is to explain that each of us pass through a state of hypnosis twice a day: once in the morning when we go from a state of sleep to the waking state: and at night when we slide from the waking state down into sleep. Once the hypnotist has established rapport, a basic induction and deepening technique is employed. During the basic induction, the hypnotist will ask the subject to "sit back and close your eyes, take several deep breaths, and with each breath, as you exhale you will release all of the tension within you. You will release all of the anxiety, slowing everything down as though it is in slow motion. A gentle wave of energy washes over your body, and as it does, it begins the relaxation process. With each breath, as you exhale, you become more and more relaxed. We are going to go down through the body, releasing all the muscles, and as we do, I want you to release the hold and allow gravity to pull on the muscles. It is a good feeling not to resist the gravitational pull. We begin at the top of the head by releasing and relaxing all of the muscles in the head, the scalp, the forehead, across the brow and the eyes. Releasing and relaxing all of the facial muscles and the

muscles in the jaw. Releasing all of the muscles in the head, and allowing the tongue to just rest on the floor of the mouth. Now, relax the muscles in the neck, down the spine, and out across the back. Relax the shoulders, the arms and hands, allowing any tension that you feel to just flow out of your body through the fingertips. Relax the muscles in the chest the abdominal muscles and allow gravity to pull. Releasing and relaxing the muscles in the thighs and legs, the calves and feet, allowing gravity to pull. Release and relax and allow any residual tension that you feel to flow out through the bottom of the feet. With every breath you take you become more and more relaxed."

Once the hypnotist has relaxed the subjects body, the next step is to relax the subjects mind. The hypnotist will advise the subject that "I'm going to count backward from ten to one, and as I do, I want you to visualize yourself descending a beautiful staircase. As you descend, you will release all doubt, fear, guilt, hate and anger. You will leave them on the staircase as you descend. When I reach one, you will be at the bottom of the staircase surrounded in a shield of light. The soft white light that contains all color, appearing like a spotlight on a dark stage. This light is your shield of protection.

When I say the number ten, take a deep breath, and begin descending the beautiful staircase. Ten, nine, eight, going deeper and deeper within. The deeper you go the more

beauty you see. Seven, six, five, more and more relaxed, both body and mind. Releasing all doubt, fear, guilt, hate, and anger, leaving them on the staircase as you descend. Four, three, two, and one, standing at the bottom of the beautiful staircase surrounded in your shield of light. The things that would normally upset you, make you nervous, or hurt your feelings are like the darkness on the stage and when these things come close enough to you to make you uncomfortable in any way, the light of the shield illuminates them so you can see them clearly. You can see them objectively and deal with them in a positive way. The shield is with you twenty four hours a day, and you can use that shield at any time you feel yourself becoming nervous, irritable, angry, or upset in any way. When you need to use the shield, just stop, take a deep breath, and know that the shield is there, and you will feel calm, and be able to see the things that are going on around you in a much clearer way. You will be able to see things objectively and be able to deal with them in a positive way. The things that are negative to you will be neutralized by your shield. The shield contains all color. The color pink appears within your shield and represents peace, calm, tranquillity, and divine love. The pink light appears like a mist within your shield and will caress and cherish you. It cradles you like an infant in your mothers arms. Inhale the pink mist and you will feel the inner peace, the calm, and know that this is

who you really are." When the subject has reached a somnambulistic state, the hypnotist will use post-hypnotic suggestions which will allow the subject to relax.

"Each night as you prepare for sleep, close your eyes and take a deep breath. You will become calm and relaxed and drift very easily, very quickly into a beautiful sleep, feeling good about yourself and the world around you. Your dreams are positive dreams and will help you see clearly solutions to any problem that you are having during the day.

Each morning, upon awakening, you will remember your dreams, and awaken refreshed, revitalized, feeling good about yourself and the world about you. You will be able to function easily in a calm and relaxed manner."

Concluding Remarks:

Hypnosis will not replace all of the traditional methods which increase employee morale, but will supplement these methods and allow the employee to deal more effectively with the physical and psychological stress which he is experiencing.

Hypnosis is a very important and useful tool, and used correctly, can make the work place a much more compatible place for both the employee as well as the supervisor.

ENDNOTES

¹Lazrus and Delongis, Stress and the Correctional Employee, (Canada: Lawrance Breen, 1983), 25-26.

²Barnes and Noble, The Complete Guide To Hypnosis, (California: Leslie M. LeCron, 1973), 141-167.

³Westwood Publishing Co., Hypnotherapy, (California: Dave Elman, 1964), 238-274.

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