

Leadership During Stressful Times

Leadership, especially during the difficult times of budget cuts, can be demanding for even the most versatile managers. Multiple agendas always exist, including managing day to day responsibilities while helping others deal with heavy work loads, re-purposing, assignments to other geographical areas and/or possible job loss. In a recent article, the **Minnesota State Employee Assistance Program identified five leadership agendas that must be managed:**

- 1) One's own reactions
- 2) Employee reactions
- 3) The flow of information
- 4) Work group dynamics and changing relationships, and
- 5) Getting the day-to-day work done

Depending on how each person reacts to stress, there may be a tendency to ignore one or all of these agendas at any given time. It is helpful to remember that each of these agendas need attention – **particularly now** – as most SRS employees are anxious about what the change will mean for them.

Previous experiences with privatization and hospital closures teach us significant change can be as exhausting for leaders as those providing direct services. The following suggestions came from managers and supervisors during closure at WSH&TC:

Coping Suggestions:

- < Insure **your own** personal and family needs are being met. It is difficult supporting others when weighed down by personal considerations.
- < **Practice stress management techniques** and good health management, including diet, sleep and exercise. Modeling stress management is part of leadership.
- < Involve **other managers** as a support group.
- < Prepare for a **wide range of responses**, both from yourself and from others. SRS has a diverse group of employees whose stress management responses are functions of genetics, life and coping styles, cultures, personal situations, health, financial and family traditions.
- < **Expect staff to be conflicted** between their responsibilities to clients and their own needs. Productivity may increase or decrease depending on how these conflicts are addressed. Staff will have questions

about their job, their future, their responsibility for clients, the state budget situation, relocation assistance, severance



packages, insurance, and other issues dealing with career and life transitions.

- < Remember **human needs** must be met before staff can embrace change.
- < **Keep everyone informed** of the latest and most recent information about the change(s) occurring. Resentment is minimized when everyone is in the loop.
- < The needs of staff being re-located or laid off are **different** than those remaining.
- < **Individual meetings** with staff being re-located, re-purposed, or laid-off are invaluable as a means of expressing care and personal support. Even during the worse of circumstances, most staff want to know they are valued contributors to the work of SRS.
- < There are **fluid stages** to the change process. People need an opportunity to assess what the change means for them. There is value in accepting feelings, then helping to clarify the practical resources which will be available to help manage the change.
- < Identify **specific agency possibilities** for future reassignment and/or employment.

Help is Available:

SRS has extensive experience in dealing with change. **SRS Human Resources** will be available to meet with each person undergoing significant change to discuss benefits, employment options, insurance issues, transfers, and other issues important to them. **LIFELINE** is available for all employees by calling 1-800-284-7575. **Employee Relation Counselors** are located in many SRS offices. In addition, the **SRS Office of Diversity, Employee Relations Office**, also has a toll free, confidential number any SRS employee can use to talk over work related problems. Dial 1-877-277-1369 or TTY 1-785-296-1491.