



The New Person on Staff Helping Alleviate Stress

by KATHY TAYLOR-ROGERS

The majority of people in the workforce face job changes or changes in location of one's job from time to time for a variety of different reasons. Within the teaching profession, movement from one job or location to another can be fairly common. This requirement for moving around has probably never been so prevalent than it has in recent years. No matter how frequently this may happen it does not lessen the potential impact it can have on the person involved.

As a new member on staff you could fall into one of two categories: a new teacher with no previous teaching experience; or a teacher with any number of years experience in other schools who has for one reason or another had to transfer or be reassigned. Regardless of which category you fall into, the experience is stressful and potentially anxiety provoking. The unknown always creates some degree of stress and anxiety, but some people cope with this stress better than others. There can be many uncertainties and unanswered questions such as: What will my colleagues be like?; Will people like me?; What will the administration be like?; How much support will I receive during difficult times?; What will the job expectations be?; Am I up for a new challenge?; How helpful will my colleagues be if I need advice?; What outstanding issues are there within the school? And the list can go on and on. Usually over time, the anxiety becomes greatly reduced. Those who were new to a school in September usually start to feel more comfortable and relaxed in their new environment as the year progresses.

We can all play a role in helping alleviate some of the stress associated with being a new staff member. One suggestion is to establish a welcoming committee within your school and have a colleague from the faculty assigned to each new teacher on staff as their peer support person. This colleague would be the person who the new teacher can go to and ask questions regarding all of the formal and informal procedures, policies, protocols and practices within

the school. It is important that the individual performing the role as peer support person make the new teacher feel comfortable about coming to them for advice at any time and on any matter. Only those comfortable in this role should volunteer to take it on. It should not be a mandatory assignment.

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One of the most awkward parts of starting at a new location is not knowing the “norm”; not knowing what the routine is for the staff. There are any number of practices in every workplace that everyone takes for granted and many times people forget to ensure that new staff members are made aware of them. These practices and expectations can be such things as social club expectations, the expectation to assist with clean-up of the lunch room, the schedule of regular staff meetings, and coffee protocols, just to name a few. There are so many of these types of expectations that it is easy to forget to tell someone about all of them. Your school may want to give some thought to developing an information handbook. This could contain information on everything that a new staff member may need to know. This handbook would always be a “work in progress”, and new staff members would be an invaluable resource in providing you with feedback on any information that needs to be added.

Another suggestion is to try to plan a social event early in the school year so staff have an opportunity to get to know one another in a more informal environment. This gives everyone a chance to spend time with each other in a neutral setting without the

formality of the work environment. Peer support is essential to good staff relations and can really assist with overall stress levels. A positive environment between and among your staff can greatly assist in counterbalancing the day to day stressors being faced in the classroom.

We have all been that new staff member at some point in our career and we can all play a part in trying to make the transition for our new staff members as easy and painless as possible. Sometimes we get so caught up in the busy pace of our own lives and job responsibilities that we forget to take the time to recognize what others are going through. The little comments, actions and offers of support can make a big difference. One caution though, we don't want to overwhelm new staff with "office politics" right from the start. Give them time to orient themselves to their new work environment and let them make their own judgements on what is happening in the work place.

We also need to be cognizant of our own level of negativity and how and where we express that. Negativity does nothing to improve our lives or enhance our work environment. If we see something we don't like, then the proactive step to take is to identify possible ways to improve the situation. Unloading our resentments and problems on the new staff person because they are a potential sympathetic ear is selfish and irresponsible. If there are concerns that will affect them, then they will figure them out on their own and can formulate their own ideas and thoughts on the matter.

We all need to feel positive energy particularly when faced with a new situation which is going to be an important part of our lives. We can all be a part of making those first few weeks as positive an experience as possible for someone new. The most interesting and exciting part about this is that we feel good when we take a part in making other people feel good.

Kathy Taylor-Rogers is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Kathy Taylor-Rogers (ext. 242) or Marie Wall (ext. 265).



WELLNESS TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Change can be stressful due to the uncertainty that accompanies it. To help us through change we must ...

- seek information;
- communicate our needs;
- take care of ourselves physically;
- ask questions of others and look for guidance;
- accept the change;
- think positively;
- be open to unexpected outcomes;
- pay attention to stress symptoms;
- develop strategies for dealing with stress.

"CHANGE IS A NATURAL PART OF LIFE;
ACCEPT IT, LEARN FROM IT AND GROW WITH IT."

Please send your comments or suggestions to:

Kathy Taylor-Rogers, Wellness Program

c/o NLTA, 3 Kenmount Road, St. John's, NF, A1B 1W1

Tel. 726-3223 or 1-800-563-3599, Ext. 242; Fax 726-4302 or 1-877-711-NLTA (6582)

e-mail: ktaylor-rogers@nlta.nf.ca

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