Workplace stress is at an all-time high. A recent poll shows that more than 80% of U.S. workers are stressed about their jobs. Stress not only affects your health, job satisfaction, and well-being, but also what you get done. Workplace stress makes people less efficient, less productive, and creates tension. There’s been a lot of buzz lately about reducing stress. A quick search for “mindfulness” and “workplace” brings up almost half a million results. And these strategies seem to work: mindfulness improves leadership ability, self-confidence, and well-being. It’s becoming an essential part of stress management in the workplace.

Beyond Mindfulness

But what if you could go a step further, and redesign your job? What if you could add or subtract tasks, build more collaborative relationships, and focus on the parts of your job that make work satisfying and meaningful? What if you could tap into a deep sense of purpose?

This last item is key. “Having a purpose,” says blogger Tom Thiss,” is the difference between making a living and making a life.” It’s also the premise of the book, Make Your Job a Calling,” by Brian Dik & Ryan Duffy. They give examples of people – from traffic directors to teachers to custodial staff – who have transformed their jobs. Stress management in the workplace, they found, is less about finding a “perfect job,” and more about making shifts in what you do, how you work with people, and what value you see in your work.

They break their approach into three parts: Task Crafting, Relationship Crafting, and Cognitive Crafting. Each of these can help with stress management in the workplace by tapping into your strengths, values, and sense of purpose.

Task Crafting

Task crafting means taking a look at what you do from moment to moment each day. Which tasks do you like most? Which do you like least? Can you change the time you spend on these tasks? Are there new tasks you would like to add?

Many years ago, my job changed through task crafting. I worked at a counseling agency, wondered if there was a way to tell how well our programs were working. I designed a simple survey for clients who were finishing our programs. A few months later, I numbers that showed the kinds of changes our clients made, as well as quotes and stories for our first ever annual report. Over time this led to a shift in my job from Clinical Supervisor to Program Evaluator – a position that hadn’t existed before I started to add these tasks. The same thing can happen for you. When you begin to do even a little more of what you love, you enjoy your work more...and sometimes your work shifts in new and interesting
ways. It’s a new way to think about stress management in the workplace.

**Relationship Crafting**

If you’re like most people with jobs outside the home, you spend more time with people you work with than you do with your family. Positive, collaborative relationships are essential. Relationship crafting means making conscious choices about who you work with and how you work with other people. Who would you like to spend more time with? Perhaps there is a way you can team up for a project. Is there someone you’d like to work less with? Maybe you can get more done through email.

Stress management in the workplace often means building different types of relationships. For example, one therapist built her private practice by having lunch with a different colleague in a different restaurant each week. She looked forward to meeting people, and marketing her business practice felt fun.

One moderately sized academic department shifted workplace relationships by offering fruit, cheese, and cookies every Friday afternoon. Faculty, students, and staff came together to enjoy the food and chat, which changed the way they worked together and made the department more cohesive.

**Cognitive Crafting**

Stress management in the workplace through cognitive crafting means looking for purpose and meaning in your work. It often means making a shift in how you see your work. Fundraising, for example, often ranks as people’s least favorite work-related activity. A top fundraiser saw it differently. “People believe in what you do and they want to help,” she told a group of parents. “But they don’t know how. By offering them a way to contribute, you’re helping them help your community.”

Another example involves a freelance CPA who helped businesses recover from financial disasters. She saw her work as solving problems, which she loved. When you’re clear about the purpose and value of what you’re doing, stress management in the workplace becomes much easier.

You can find a complete Job Crafting Manual or an abbreviated version in Dik and Duffy’s book. But to get started, try this exercise:

1. List your passions. You might list, “being creative,” or “teaching” or “creating order out of chaos.”
2. List your job tasks. Decide which of them use your passions. Which tasks, for example, require creativity? Which require teaching?
3. For each of the passions you listed, ask yourself how you might make a shift in your work. Is there any part of your job where you could add creativity? Could you do less of the least creative parts of your job? Is there a creative but challenging task that someone else might be willing to trade for a more straightforward but simpler one?

Asking these questions will get ideas percolating and lead to shifts.

**A New Kind of Stress Management in the Workplace**

If you’re part of the 80% of people looking for stress management in the workplace, the literature on mindfulness is filled with evidence-based techniques to help you relax. In many organizations, employers are integrating mindfulness into the organization’s culture. You can take it a step further though, by focusing on which parts of your job are meaningful, and where you can add meaning. Dik and Duffy suggest doing this in three ways – through Task Crafting, Relationship Crafting, and Job Crafting. Attention to these three processes can
change the nature of your work, and how you feel when you’re working. Instead of making a living, you’ll be making a life.