



The Triple A Threat:

How to Reduce Anxiety, Anger, and Aggression in the Workplace

meQuilibrium

You've probably walked into work many times with something from home lingering in the back of your mind: Your child received a bad grade and is struggling in class, or maybe your sibling fell ill over the weekend.

That day probably wasn't very productive — you felt disengaged and disoriented, like a fog was hanging over your desk.

Now imagine that anxiety has increased, becoming a real burden: Your sibling's illness has worsened and you're awaiting medical results, or your company is making a round of layoffs due to automation — and you might be next. Then pile on top of that the stress related to your everyday work. The compounded effect feels unbearable.

Here's the truth:

Your employees are constantly going through a rollercoaster of emotions, bringing their anxieties into work and piling on stressors they experience throughout their workday. Since humans are not machines that you can reprogram, many organizations are wondering what to do to help in the day or weeks or even months when they're in the midst of stress-induced anxiety.

As a leader, you know the dangers of unchecked anxiety and the serious implications this has on your future workforce. You've watched the news and read the headlines. Without any solution in place, anxiety can quickly boil over into anger — or worse — aggression.

The takeaway:

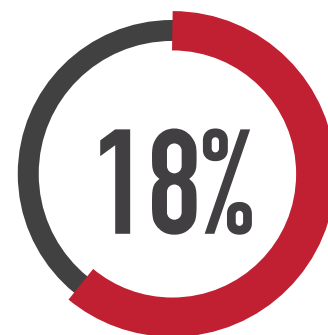
There is a way to help your employees. Science has proved that there are ways to reduce the potential dangers of unchecked stress. Furthermore, there are ways to turn the moment of stress into an opportunity for personal development, to help employees by providing techniques that address the feeling of mania in the moment, and ongoing activities to prevent this triple threat from taking hold of them in the first place.

In this white paper, we'll first define these anxieties and what effect they have on your company and your employees. We then outline ways you can create a better, healthier working environment where you and your people thrive. Let's get started.

ANXIETY IS A MASSIVE — AND GROWING — OBSTACLE TO PRODUCTIVITY

Anxiety affects millions of people every year — about 40 million, in fact, or roughly 18% of the U.S. population.¹ It's also growing at an alarming rate. In a 2018 survey by the American Psychiatric Association, nearly 40% of respondents said they had more anxiety than in the prior year.²

Beyond the serious impact to the individual, anxiety and its increasing spread is a jarring wake-up call to businesses, with U.S. costs totaling \$300 billion.³ Additionally, the outcomes — including workplace accidents, absenteeism, and turnover — are found to halt and even decline productivity growth, with the WHO (World Health Organization) estimating a \$1 trillion global loss in productivity from anxiety in the workplace.⁴



Anxiety affects roughly 18% of the U.S. population.¹

Think about these facts in terms of your organization. Do you know how much anxiety and stress are costing you? What if you could measure stress and identify indicators of anxiety ahead of time to help address it? Better yet, what if you could use these insights to empower your people to develop themselves through personalized trainings based on their own needs? What would the future of your company look like with a resilient workforce at this scale?

Through our team's work with top employers at the forefront of addressing employee anxiety and the manifestation of it in the workplace, we've found that there is a way to help. It starts by acknowledging the problem at a leadership level and aligning your people leaders around a shared understanding of what these issues are, what they mean to the individual employee going through it, and how you can help them in a meaningful way in their moment of need.

¹ Facts & Statistics. Anxiety and Depression Association of America. [Available here.](#)

² APA Public Opinion Poll — Annual Meeting 2018. American Psychiatric Association. 2018. [Available here.](#)

³ Workplace Stress. The American Institute for Stress. [Available here.](#)

⁴ Mental Health in the Workplace. The World Health Organization. [Available here.](#)

WHAT EXACTLY IS ANXIETY, ANGER, AND AGGRESSION?

The Triple A Threat contains three concepts that are important to understand. So, we'll need some definitions. Definitions help equip you to address anxiety and its problems throughout your organization.⁵

Let's start first with stress and stressors, since unchecked stress can lead to anxiety, anger, and aggression. So, it's natural to start here.

Stress

STRESS IS THE PATTERN OF RESPONSES SOMEONE MAKES TO STIMULI THAT DISTURBS THEIR EQUILIBRIUM AND ABILITY TO COPE.

You read earlier that stress costs U.S. businesses \$300 billion per year. That's because unchecked stress, according to the APA's Center for Workplace Mental Health, can develop into even more prominent issues:

- **Damage to key brain structures and circuitry, reduced ability to cope with future stress, and increased anxiety and chronic depression**
- **The onset of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**
- **Reduced immune system functioning**
- **Increased inflammation and depression⁷**

Stressor: Any emotional, physical, social, economic, or other factor that disrupts the normal physiological, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral balance of an individual.⁶

This is the key: Everyone has stressors in their lives every day — some small, some large. Of course, when you experience stress, it's only natural to be upset. However, when prolonged stress goes on without any remedy, your ability to cope decreases.

In other words, if you don't have the resilience to handle the anxiety that comes from stress, over time it can develop into anger and aggression. We'll talk more about resilience in a moment.

⁵ For more on this, download our white paper "Building the Business Case for Resilience." [Available here.](#)

⁶ Adapted from "Stress," "stressor." Glossary of Technical Terms. American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). Arlington, VA, American Psychiatric Association, 2013. 829.

⁷ Workplace Stress. American Psychiatric Association: Center for Workplace Mental Health. [Available Here.](#)

Anxiety

ANXIETY IS AN EMOTION CHARACTERIZED BY FEELINGS OF TENSION, WORRIED THOUGHTS, AND PHYSICAL CHANGES LIKE INCREASED BLOOD PRESSURE.⁸

People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or a rapid heartbeat.

These symptoms can be the result of many stressors, from being late to a meeting to the fear of a layoff. These daily triggers provoke feelings of apprehension and a sense of being overwhelmed or threatened. Your employees may feel this very real emotion in their physical bodies — like in their stomachs or upper chests, almost like they're being suffocated.

This effect on your mind and body deeply affects your ability to perform at work.

Anger

ANGER IS AN EMOTION CHARACTERIZED BY TENSION AND HOSTILITY ARISING FROM FRUSTRATION, REAL OR IMAGINED INJURY BY ANOTHER, OR PERCEIVED INJUSTICE.⁹

Anger is an emotion characterized by antagonism toward someone or something you feel has done you wrong. Anger can be a good thing. It can be a way to express negative feelings or motivate you to solve problems.

But excessive anger can cause problems. It can create harmful physical changes and make it difficult to think straight, and if it is too easily or frequently mobilized, it can undermine relationships.

⁸ Adapted from Anxiety. APA Dictionary of Psychology. American Psychological Association. [Available here](#).

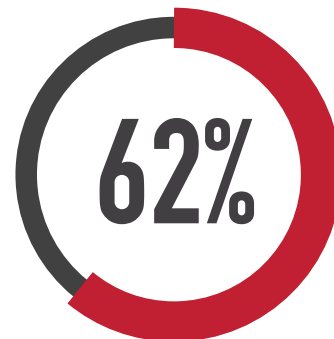
⁹ Ibid. Anger. [Available here](#).

Aggression

AGGRESSION IS A BEHAVIOR AIMED AT HARMING OTHERS PHYSICALLY OR PSYCHOLOGICALLY.¹⁰

Aggression in the workplace makes headlines with “active shooter” and “workplace violence” stories, but it can be more subtle than that.

Studies show that 62% of workers have experienced rudeness by an office bully.¹¹ Bullies can create toxic environments, which damage performance.¹² Verbal or physical outbursts as well as passive-aggressive behavior from angry colleagues take a toll on your culture, your productivity, and your bottom line.¹³



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HOW TO GO FROM THREATS TO THRIVING

We’ve used the word “unchecked” several times throughout this paper. So, the natural question is, “How do you check up on stress and anxiety?”

We believe the solution to reducing anxiety, anger, and aggression in the workplace is resilience.

Resilience is a set of skills that equips your employees with the ability to adapt, manage stress, and handle challenges with agility and a growth mindset. Through resilience training, your employees can address stresses and anxieties before they snowball into anger and acting out.

Our science-backed framework trains your employees to have the skills to unleash their full potential. With these skills, they can become more engaged and increase their performance and wellbeing, making your organization more resilient, more productive, and more profitable over time.

How can you do this in your organization today?

¹⁰ Adapted from Anxiety APA Dictionary of Psychology. American Psychological Association. Aggression. [Available here.](#)

¹¹ Christine Porath. The Hidden Toll of Workplace Incivility. McKinsey Quarterly, December 2016. [Available here.](#)

¹² Marissa Levin. Harvard Research Proves Toxic Employees Destroy Your Culture and Your Bottom Line. Inc. April 10, 2018. [Available here.](#)

¹³ Aaron Schat and Michael R. Frone. Exposure to Psychological Aggression at Work and Job Performance: The Mediating Role of Job Attitudes and Personal Health. Work Stress 25, vol. 1 (2011): 23–40. doi: 10.1080/02678373.2011.563133

Resilience Tips for Anxiety, Anger, and Aggression

Resilience has a strong protective effect against anxiety. Our data shows that people with high levels of resilience are 12 times more likely to combat anxiety than people with low levels of resilience.

1. Assess your people.

To treat any issue, you first have to know what it is. Assessing your employees can create a program of skills to help them identify the thinking styles that are problematic, and then support healthy thinking styles with activities to practice those skills.

2. Deliver a personalized journey.

To achieve maximum effectiveness, your employees need a solid path to wellbeing made just for them. Personalized training brings resilience skills to employees when and where they need them.

3. Track your progress.

By tracking and benchmarking your journey, employees create habit-forming activities that increase their emotional health and wellbeing. Practicing these skills over time builds resilience to future threats.

4. Sustain with engagement.

To motivate your employees to continue, you can send out timely content and market resources to reinforce the key concepts they've learned along the way.

5. Model, Mentor, and Make Scalable

To spread wellbeing across the organization, build networks of resilience change agents to hold each other accountable, align on your organization's values, and promote your resiliency for others to follow.



RESILIENCE IS MORE ACHIEVABLE THAN YOU THINK

In this white paper, we've taken a hard look at the triple threat that anger, anxiety, and aggression bring to the workplace and what you can do to build a resilient workforce that is emotionally strong, suffers less anxiety, and can rebound after a setback.

The good news is that resilience can be learned. The skills of emotion control, empathy, and problem-solving, as well as managing frustration, negativity, and communication, can be built and habituated. This provides a protective shield against the debilitating impacts of anxiety that can lead to workplace anger and aggression.

meQuilibrium can help identify your employees who are struggling with these issues, help equip them with the skills to get a handle on these problems before they become serious, and help your company connect the employee with assistance and benefits programs you already have in place that support them in the moment of need.

We can identify people who are at risk: those who are often irritated and have a low threshold for anger, those who have difficulty controlling their emotions, those who have trouble keeping their emotions and behavior in check, and those whose emotions affect their productivity.

Together we can address this Triple A Threat to make your organization happier, healthier, more resilient, and better equipped to navigate this world of change.

About meQuilibrium

meQuilibrium is the engagement and performance solution that harnesses behavioral psychology and neuroscience to unleash your organization's full potential. By unlocking the power of resilient people and teams, your organization can navigate even the most turbulent of times. Powered by the predictive meQ scores and data-driven insights, our solution uses a clinically validated assessment and robust benchmarking to measure resilience and create personalized training programs that build team and employee skills. With meQuilibrium, you can equip each of your employees to discover and master the skills they need to overcome any obstacle, increase agility, gain adaptive capacity, and transform your organization.

To learn more about the Triple A Threat and how it's affecting your employees, meet with one of our resilience solutions experts on this topic — and build resilience today.

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