

Stress or Serenity? The Wellness Industry After COVID

We tell each other how relieved we are to be easing into post-pandemic, but unfortunately, many of us are whistling in the dark, at least a little bit. Every change causes some level of stress. Change post-pandemic is compounded by continuing fears about health, the effects of months of isolation, and financial worries from loss of work.

The spa and wellness industry gives clients and guests a soothing, healthy, and happy environment in which to restore their mental and physical resilience. But before that can happen, your own workers may need comfort and recovery. How bad is their fear?

- A survey by the [American Psychological Association](#) found that 48% of adults remained fearful of in-person interactions regardless of vaccination status; in another survey, 66% think returning to a pre-COVID life is risky.
- Moreover, 60% of employees would take a lower paying job if the workplace offered a healthier environment—and 35% have already made the switch, according to a survey by [Ambius](#).

If your staff is tense, your clients are tense. After months of required hypervigilance, wariness is natural and thanks to mirror neurons, contagious. If your massage therapists jump every time someone coughs, their massages won't relax anyone. If your staff reflexively stiffens when closer than six feet from a guest, then they're going to have a hard time delivering comfort. And if your clients and guests pick up on that subtle fear, no one will feel safe, let alone pampered.

Fortunately, as you deal with the post-pandemic fears and lingering stress of your staff, you will also gain important tools and tips for helping your clients and guests settle into their "aah" moment of stress-free peace, health, and goodwill.

10 Steps from Stress to Serenity in the Wellness Industry

1. Accept that not all stress is bad—it's part of life.

Your real goal is not to eradicate stress, but to build your staff's (and clients') confidence to deal with it. Feeling stress is not a wellness professional failure. The failure is in allowing the stress to build until it becomes toxic to you and everyone around you. Take time to reflect on your own lifelong relationship with stress. How you can boost your own coping confidence and capacity? By acknowledging your own stress story, you prepare yourself to deal with the stress of others.

2. Spread compassion, not shame.

Shame is double-dipping into stress! Reacting with stress after months of pandemic isolation and fear means you are human. For so many wellness professionals, the deluge of stress triggered imposter syndrome: how can we be showing signs of the same chronic stress we help treat in our clients and guests? But overwhelm happens to everyone. Now is the time for compassion for yourself and your team. It's a time for honoring feelings, reflecting on what matters most, extending patience to yourself and others, and recharging mind, body, and spirit. There is also no shame in asking for help.

3. Watch your language.

The words we use—whether out loud or silently—affect how we deal with stress in ourselves and others. As stress mounts, so does the brain's negativity bias. The more negatively we label a stressor, the more energy we use on it and the more toxic it becomes. When you know the right words to discuss your feelings, your own triggers, and the behavior and triggers of your team, you avoid escalating situations. You help the healing process and model the calming behavior you want your staff to show each other and to your clients and guests.

4. Think of stress as an energy management challenge.

Everything you do takes energy—from dealing with upset clients to planning a fun celebration. When the demand for your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy starts to exceed your supply, you become stressed. That's why it's important to embrace “no,” develop new wellness habits, recharge through nature or other mindfulness practices, and ask for and accept help. Self-care is not optional: “You cannot serve from an empty vessel.” (Eleanor Brown)

5. Let go of perfect.

In my own practice, I frequently notice that high achievers compare their achievements to those of other people as well as to some sort of ideal perfection. These tendencies ramp up to toxic levels under duress and make you a slave to your inner critic, instead of exploring what works best for you. When you and your team work with your individual strengths—using a strengths-based approach—you set achievable goals, stay in tune with your values, feel energized to overcome setbacks, support each other, and stay motivated.

6. Encourage questions and connections.

Curiosity is truly a superpower in the face of stress. It lights up your frontal lobe giving you greater access to creativity and innovation. Curiosity fuels questions that help you figure out what's really at stake, what matters most, what's worked for you in the past, what you would advise your best buddy in a given situation, and so on. As you start asking questions, you distance yourself from the problem, broaden your perspective, and “unhook” from emotions. Asking questions of others shifts you from survival reactions to actively exploring different perspectives, new technologies, and new approaches. It brings the power of collaboration into play.

7. Embrace vulnerability.

Chronic stress is not good for you at work or at home. No one can do their best thinking under prolonged stress. As a wellness professional, you have experienced the huge rewards of helping others. Give someone else their chance. Learn to accept and model vulnerability as a strength.

8. Listen to your staff.

Listening to your clients and guests—their needs, expectations, and concerns—is only good business. So is listening to your staff, who may be struggling financially, physically, mentally, and emotionally after more than a year of uncertainty and fear. What will make them comfortable in the workplace? What supports can you supply or direct them toward? The changes they request may also be the changes that make your clients and guests feel safe and welcome.

9. Listen to your body.

Stress affects the body. It cramps the muscles, causes headaches and backaches, distracts the mind, and leads to accidents. You and your staff cannot possibly operate at maximum when your bodies are protesting. You know this applies to your spa or wellness destination guests, but may forget to apply the same standard to your team. Notice what your body is telling you. Encourage your staff to notice stress in themselves and each other and lend a helping hand. Breathe. Ground. Recharge. When faced with overwhelm, put on your virtual hazmat suits and detox yourselves!

10. Celebrate the wins.

After a year focused on constantly reacting to change and uncertainty, it's even more important to capture the "aah" moments and the wins—savor them, learn from them, build on them. Stay alert to reward the positive behaviors and interactions that will spread healing, resilience, and serenity from you to your staff and on to your clients and guests. A stress-smart, stress-strong, and stress-wise life is within your reach.

*With her unique background in medicine, neuropsychology, leadership development, and coaching, Dr. Cindi Ackrill brings both compassion and science to stress management. A certified leader in the field for over 25 years, Cindi understands the challenges and metrics unique to the spa and wellness industries. **The support you deserve is [right here](#).***