

Effects of Stress on Staff/Students Faceoff: Volume I

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Abstract

Within the university environment, various issues can manifest that causes confrontation between university non-academic staff and students. Therefore, this paper on ‘effects of stress on staff/students faceoff: volume I’ emphasized on stressors such as office workload, multitasking, students’ behaviour, misunderstanding between staff and students, pressure and over-crowding and their effects on staff-students interactions. Various suggestions were consequently put forward for both staff and students to manage any possible issues that may unfold in the course of their interactions.

Keyword: Stress, Staff, Students, Faceoff

Introduction

As a student, you may have come across or heard of non-academic staff being rude sometimes or having confrontation with students because of mere issues like giving you an instruction that you did not follow properly. At other times however, you may have been yelled at because you did something slightly wrong, something that a simple correction would have rectified. When most students are faced with this type of challenges, they may react in two ways – either suddenly become hostile or feel sorrowful and pitiable. What students may not really know is that staff hostility sometimes can be caused by stress levels. At a point in the office, I begin to realize that my attitude in the afternoons differs from the attitude I brought to the office in the mornings. It is even worse when there is much task to handle and sometimes end up yelling at customers whom I should be pampering. You know what they said – the customer has always been right!

Stress as used here refers to anything that puts the staff in discomfort for an elongated period of time. To the layman, when you are discomforted for a short

period of time, it can't really be said to be stress – it is only when the discomfort is taking longer than you want that stress begins to creep in. One thing that is observed is that staff attitude tends to change whence they are exposed to some sort of pressure from their workplace. Within the university terrain, there are a lot of tasks especially within staff attending to freshmen that they have to engage that can make them easily tired out; so the freshmen are easy targets to the faceoff/confrontation with university staff than returning students.

It would be nice to superficially discuss the idea of stress and staff/students faceoff as used in this context before going deep into the paper. For now, let us look into the concept of stress as used in this study.

Stress Operationalized

The definition of stress is multi-dimensional; that is, it can be defined in various ways. Homewood (n.d.) defined stress as a physiological and psychological response to activities that excite our mental state in various ways. What the above definition implies is that stress can come from various stressors – both the ones that are physical and the ones that are emotional. From another perspective, stress was defined either as a reaction or as a stimulus (Ioanna, Konstantinos, Neroliatsiou, & Aikaterini, 2015). As a reaction the meaning of stress is tied with specific changes that human biological system is experiencing. As stimulus, the definition of stress is related to environmental events that cause those changes. The stressful events can be chronic, acute, continuous, remitting and in chronic form (ibid, 2015). The purpose of adopting the above definition was to underscore how stress operates in university staff and the attendant consequences. After briefly operationlizing stress, it is now imperative to understand staff/students faceoff.

Staff/Students Faceoff

In many universities, issues often emerge between staff and students. However, the most pompous ones amongst these are lecturer/students issues. Lecturers have been fingered to fail students because of students' misdemeanors and at some other times, it is because of sexual/relationship issues. However, this is outside the target of the current paper. Here, we want to look into faceoff between non academic staff and students. During the author's admission/clearance/verification days as a freshman, it was recounted how an admission/verification officer treated the author. Till date, there is still this involuntary hatred in some part of the author for the particular officer. This was due to a one-time show of unprofessional conduct. Sometimes, when non-academic staff yells at students, one begins to wonder if the

students were the cause of their problems or maybe they had quarrels before the time. At the end, it turns out to be a mere happenstance, just a flare of a fit of anger.

Non-academic staff can easily flare up when students don't follow instructions, make derogatory comments, crown an office or not meet up with requirements/instructions. At the extreme, staff can also exhibit fits of anger without any tangible reason; this is often possible when staff happens to be tensed or stressed up. Stress often becomes bogus during the afternoon hours when staff could have immersed themselves in hectic office duties and those who cannot hold it dish it out to send a signal to the students not to be disturbed nor pressured.

Causes of Stress Amongst University Staff

As earlier stated, there are various factors that can make a staff stressed up that may lead to confrontation with the students. Here, we shall list only six of them:

1. **Office workload:** When office is filled with tasks, it is possible to feel overwhelmed with activities. From incoming to outgoing mails, documents processing, students and public requests, it is sometimes difficult to complete all tasks at the same time. This put staff under pressure and lends them out to hostility and confrontation with students sometimes.
2. **Too many instructions:** Sometimes, a staff can receive varied instructions which he/she is unable to accomplish/follow promptly. An attempt to multi-task to accomplish a better part of the tasks can lead to heightened stress and create a sudden type of mental imbalance that can result to staff giving unpalatable responses to students.
3. **Students' behaviour:** Students can really be nasty a times. Some wants to get what they need immediately without recourse to existing circumstances they meet in the office. Some students can even see a staff eating and go along with their requests. You can't just trust some of these staff, their response may be as bad as circumstances are. Students can also overcrowd offices, frowns at staff because of delays in response time and even be the ones to institute a faceoff. All these constitute stress and office hazards to the university non academic staff.
4. **Misunderstanding between staff and students:** At other times, confrontation can happen because of mere misunderstanding of a statement, direct instructions or body gesture. A lecturer had intended to fail a male student who he thought was dating a female student he too was having

relationship with but for timely intervention of the female student who through interactions got to know what the lecturer was thinking and quickly explained their relationship status to the lecturer. The boy happened to be the Christian type who always takes these girls to church while the lecturer thinks since they are always together, he is the one taking them to bar and parties. This type of misunderstanding amongst others that happens between staff and students can easily cause faceoff in schools.

5. **Pressure:** Pressure can be a very good tool to be efficient; but this will not be the case when it comes to customer relations. When exposed to extreme pressure, staff may explode at any instance of provocation from students. If the students were not careful enough to calm themselves down to swallow the disrespect, it may land them in trouble.
6. **Over-crowding:** University offices are often exposed to overcrowding. A university student in Nigeria will start facing overcrowding when they first come to write their Post UTME examinations. From thence to clearance-verification-faculty file opening-medicals etc., there are instances of overcrowding. Students must learn to be patient when in an overcrowded area. In fact, it is better to be crowded outside and allow a student per time to enter an office. This is to allow the officer conveniently attend to them all. This is because when overcrowded, officers may become hostile as the environment makes them almost moribund which may result in yelling to clear the office.

Effects of Stress on Staff/Students Faceoff

The stress levels of university staff can significantly determine the interactions between them and students. For example, staff are often mild-tempered in the office during morning hours when their temperament is stabilized. During this period, their interactions are normal, easygoing and stable. This situation can possibly be maintained till close of work if not pressured later on. The situation may get worse when a little pressure is attached. In some offices, some staff are expected to attend to as many students that can take the whole working hours. Consequently, it is very possible to see staff who leave the seat to ease off either to eat, use the convenience, stretch or to merely change positions because of health reasons. Under this condition, any attempt by the waiting students to express displeasure over delayed handling of their matters is easily/quickly thwarted with yelling or derogatory remarks which such staff may not want to use but for existing circumstances.

May it be stated however, that many students do not understand how to handle staff excesses. Even when some offices are filled up, students who want to be attended to at all cost still enter such offices in their bid to get their issues resolved. Students are also in the habits of not knowing where to draw the curtains. For example, when a staff is eating in the office, a student should be insightful enough to understand that such staff needs space. So also, when staff is feeling pressure sometimes, it is expedient to check back again to give them time to relax except such student request is very important and could not wait. Knowing these office ethics will help students especially freshmen to avoid staff faceoff because they are the worst hit. The following are tips/suggestions in dealing with officers/students in the university.

Tips/Suggestions (For Staff)

To avoid staff/students faceoff, staff should take note of the following suggestions:

1. Endeavour to remain calm. Students will always exhibit negative attitudes. Some of the students, especially the freshmen would often think that since they are now in the university, those staff has never been to the class before; that they are the only ones who have gone to a university. The feelings can be overwhelming on the part of the students. When faced with students' behavioural issues, staff should endeavour to be patient with them since any negative faceoff may create a long time impression that there may not be time to settle. So, extra patience is highly suggested.
2. Take one request at a time. Handling issues at a reasonable pace is very important unless your mental, emotional and physical state permit adding more tasks or even multi-tasking. Easygoing tasks engender you to utilize such patience needed to handle students' excesses.
3. Avoid quick response. If a staff have a tetchy personality, things may often go wrong in the office. Be patient - patience is a virtue.
4. Do not allow overcrowding inside the office. Allow only one or two students at a time for easy sorting of issues.
5. Be dedicated to office tasks. Students can perceive when a staff is lazy and delays attention to them. It may elicit negative gestures from the students.

Tips/Suggestions (For Students)

1. Always knock before entering.
2. Once you enter an office, withdraw if someone is already there unless you have a reason to stay.

3. Do not be part of students who crowd an office, unless there is reason to be so. Overcrowding can easily cause frustration and if prolonged, it may result to being stressed and harassment may follow.
4. When you receive a rebuke, do not talk back, keep silent. You may decide to walk away and come back later or stay back for a while. Wisdom is profitable to direct. Don't create an opportunity for any staff to sit on your file for weeks. At a senior level, a student can write to the vice chancellor to address such issues of staff behaviours if it leads to prolonged delays in attending to the student, but as undergraduate, such knowledge and will is not always there.
5. Do not try to hurry any staff. At best, humbly appeal to their sensibilities that you are out of time.
6. Do not attack any staff especially those that are handling your files. It is a call for trouble.
7. It is very possible that a staff would want to discipline a student for misbehavior. This is because as a university environment, a student is to be awarded in character first before learning. So, everyone around the institution becomes part in character formulation. Therefore, be submissive even when you feel that a particular staff wants to teach you a lesson. If the staff is on the right track, he/she will address such students' issue in no time.

Conclusion

Staff/students faceoff can take a worse turn if not properly managed. In any faceoff, students are the sufferers and must therefore, be very careful when they find themselves in any faceoff. "Sorry doesn't tear your clothes" says an African adage, hence, students should be insightful enough to foresee trouble and avoid it on time. Don't show any staff how rich you are; there would be no need for that. Just get your issues sorted out and leave. This is the right and safe path to thread.

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