

Simple things can reduce your anxiety at work

BY ANYA LITVAK

Consider a violin as a metaphor for stress, says Rex Gatto, a Pittsburgh-based business psychologist who founded Gatto Associates LLC.

A string with no tension at all will not play. One pulled too tightly will break at the strike of a bow. It requires the right balance of tension, or stress, to make a violin, or a person, functional and productive.

Gatto has built a successful practice advising companies how they can promote a healthy workplace. Here are some stress-reducing tips he recommends:

- Don't eat lunch at your desk. Get up and walk around during your lunch break.

Go outside. Talk to people. Take a 15-minute break in the morning and another in

the afternoon.

- Make an "I did" list at the end of the day. Realize that every time you pick up the phone and answer, you've provided a service. Don't write long to-do lists.

- At the end of the day, lay out one project to do first thing the next morning. When you come in the next day, do not check your voicemail or e-mail until you've finished that project. There is a lessened sense of accomplishment with e-mails and voicemails, Gatto says, because they replenish quickly. A completed project will boost your daily confidence and take advantage of the fresh brain you have in the morning.

- Don't schedule meetings on Fridays. Use the day to get work done and put clo-

sure to the week. If you need to speak with somebody, use the phone.

- Hold 5-10 minute heads-up meetings where no one sits down. When people stand, they are briefer and more attentive, Gatto says.

- Always have a written agenda for the meeting and a clear goal of what will be accomplished by the meeting's end. Before adjourning, figure out what everyone agreed with and what actions will be taken as a result.

- Challenge negative thinking. Ask yourself, "what's the one thing that went right today?"

- Smile. If you walk around with a "poo face," as Gatto calls it, you're liable to get it back from others. If you smile, people in your office might be inclined to smile with you.