

For release the week of May 4, 2009

Recognizing Stress And Its Effects Is Goal For ESC Staff In Turbulent Times

BY MOSES CAREY JR.

The current and foreseeable economic conditions may have significant effects not only on the N.C. Employment Security Commission's customers, but also our staff in trying to effectively serve those who come through our doors, call or e-mail us.

As a preventive and awareness measure, I have urged all the agency's employees to contact their area mental health services organization, also known as the Local Management Entity, that serves the area where they live to seek assistance in providing an in-service education program for ESC office staff on recognizing the signs and symptoms of stress and where persons experiencing such stress can seek help.

Perhaps we can play a part in preventing or mitigating events associated with stress before they escalate to catastrophic events.

Unfortunately, one of the most depressing times in a person's life can be when they lose a job. Our jobs help define us in large measure and obviously take much of our time. We have friends and a support system while we are working and that is important as well. When many lose their job, one of the first points of contact is our agency.

We strive to teach our staff that dealing with customers who have met a low point in their lives can bring out challenges which we don't see every day. We have to respond carefully and thoughtfully as we assist customers who show the effects of stress.

I want us to be a support for all our customers and to know how to work with those in the many different situations that are presented when someone contacts us or comes into our offices across the state. We have a zero tolerance policy — both for staff members and customers — which is in place for everyone's safety. This means that violent acts or the threat of the same, or bringing weapons into an office, will be grounds for authorities being alerted. Such situations do not happen very often, but we must be aware at all times.

This is why I want to expand our knowledge, to broaden our ability to recognize what our customers need and to be able to help in a critical time.

(Moses Carey Jr. is chairman of the N.C. Employment Security Commission.)