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### The office killjoy

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## XTRA WORK STRESS

# THE OFFICE KILLJOY

If you think stress makes you more productive, then you need to change

DR MANOJ THULASIDAS

HOW can we manage stress, given that it is unavoidable in our corporate existence?

Common tactics against stress include exercise, yoga, meditation, breathing techniques and reassessing family priorities. But I have my own secret weapons to battle stress.

One of my secret tactics is to develop a sense of proportion. Proportion can be measured in terms of numbers. Let's start with the number of individuals.

Every morning, when we go to work, we see thousands of faces floating by, almost all rushing to their respective jobs. Take a moment to look at them — each with their own thoughts and cares, worries and stresses.

To each of them, the only real stress is their own. But once we know that, why would we regard our own stress any more importantly than anybody else's?

The appreciation of the sheer amount of personal stresses all around us — if we stop to think about it — will put our worries in perspective.

Proportion, in terms of our size, is



also something to ponder over. We occupy a tiny fraction of a large building that houses our workplace.

And the building occupies a tiny fraction of the land that is Singapore. Most cities are so tiny that a dot on the world map is usually an overstatement of their size.

Our world, the earth, is a mere speck of dust a few miles away from a fireball. The sun and its solar system are so tiny that if you were to use a picture of our galaxy as the wallpaper on your computer, they

would share a pixel with a few thousand local stars! Our existence, along with all our worries and stresses, is incomprehensibly small.

The insignificance of our existence is not limited to space; it extends to time as well. Let's think of the universe as 45 years old. How long do you think our existence is on that scale? A few seconds!

We are created out of star dust, last for a mere cosmological instant and then turn back into star dust.

Relax; don't worry, be happy!

Sure, you may be reprimanded if that report is not ready by tomorrow. Or, your supplier may be upset your payment is delayed again. Or, your colleague may send out that backstabbing email (which is blindcopied to your boss).

But, don't you see, in this mind-numbingly-humongous universe, it does not matter an iota. In the grand scheme of things, your stress is not even static noise!

Arguments for maintaining a level of stress all hinge on an ill-conceived notion that stress aids productivity. It does not.

The key to productivity is an attitude of joy at work.

When you stop worrying about being reprimanded, backstabbed and receiving accolades, and start enjoying what you do, productivity just happens.

I know it sounds a bit idealistic, but my most productive pieces of work have happened that way.

Enjoying what I do is an ideal I will shoot for any day.

*The writer is a scientist from the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (Cern), who works at the Standard Chartered Bank in Singapore. His book, *The Unreal Universe*, is available in bookstores and at [www.TheUnrealUniverse.com](http://www.TheUnrealUniverse.com).*