

SOME EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING STRESS

In general, increasing physical fitness is a major factor in increasing one's stress tolerance. Losing weight, quitting smoking, and exercising regularly all help people deal with stress. In addition, individuals can work on building coping skills. Most of these skills involve some means of replacing strain with relaxation, such as relaxation training or meditation. Individuals can also manage stress by developing outside interests and taking short vacations from work. Some specific techniques to reduce stress on the job are discussed below.

Increase Your Control

Control can be achieved through organization of your work. Try to build in a degree of predictability. Be realistic about the amount of time needed to complete each task. If demands are unrealistic, make an effort to negotiate them. Managers must also organize their supervision and follow-up of others.

Control can be achieved through participation in decision making, especially in setting priorities and deadlines. Clarify your role and your responsibilities periodically with your supervisor. Be open with the people in the organization about the demands made on you and your responsibilities.

Control can be achieved through professional competence and task mastery. Know what you can do when accepting new work assignments. Ask questions and take the time to learn a new job thoroughly.

Work for Satisfaction

Satisfaction comes when you like what you do, when you take pleasure in the work itself. Vary your pace. Work faster at boring, repetitive tasks -- don't put them off! Allot blocks of undisturbed time for creative, satisfying work. With jobs that seem overwhelming at the start, begin slowly and take one piece at a time. Dissatisfaction results in stress. If satisfaction on the job is not possible, find satisfaction and stimulation outside your work.

Recognize the Need for Success

Everyone needs a track record of achievement. If people do not receive rewards and recognition, they begin to lose motivation. Recognize this need in yourself, and its importance for those you manage. A sense of failure results in stress. Repeated failure impacts on a person's performance in every aspect of his or her life.

Organizations can also help manage stress in several ways. Decentralization, or spreading authority more widely throughout the organization, reduces feelings of helplessness. It also allows employees more participation in making decisions, helps ensure fair organizational policies, and enhances communications within the organization -- all of which have been found to reduce work related stress. In addition, organizations can help deal with and reduce stress by enlarging and enriching jobs so that boredom is

reduced and challenge increased. Organizations can reduce the stressfulness of specific jobs by reducing travel and eliminating hazardous or unpleasant working conditions.

MORE SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES FOR COPING WITH STRESS

Train yourself to recognize the first stress signals. As soon as they appear, interrupt the stress cycle with a relaxation technique. There are several different kinds of anxiety control measures which can be used in stress situations. You will have to experiment and discover those that work best for you. (Albrecht, 1979; Ollson, 1984; and Rosenzweig, 1984)

Muscle Relaxation: Focus on one part of the body at a time. Alternately tense, then relax the muscle of that member...the face, shoulders, chest, arms, hands, fingers, stomach, legs, and feet. Concentrate on the feeling of relaxation that follows the muscle tensing. Then roll your head around clockwise, stop, counter-clockwise, stop. Repeat for at least five cycles.

Deep Breathing: This can be done anywhere, even when you are trapped in a meeting room where the atmosphere is tense. Close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Hold, count to four, release, count to four. Repeat several times; you will feel the tension release with each exhalation.

Yoga: Yoga combines daily deep-breathing and posture exercises for mental relaxation. Such breathing, with slow exhaling, fills you with oxygen and clears your lungs. Practitioners report a feeling of well-being follows the exercises, and they feel more relaxed and energetic throughout the day.

Meditation: Start with deep breathing. Choose a word, or a focal point (something pleasant like a flower) as a target for concentration. Meditate by allowing only the word (something simple like "one...one...one") or the focal point to command your attention. Do not allow any other thoughts to enter your mind. This takes practice, and at first, some determination. Gradually build your meditation time until you can clear your mind for at least 10 minutes. Meditation gives the mind a total rest and relieves you from anxious or stressful thoughts during these periods. You should feel more relaxed throughout the day and may notice increased energy to cope with stressful situations.

Music and Relaxation Tapes: Choose taped or recorded music that is especially relaxing to you and set aside a quiet time to listen. Select instrumental music, and let yourself float in the melody. You can also buy special records and tapes with detailed instructions in deep relaxation and meditation. Set aside a special listening time if you choose this method, and establish some family rules so that you will not be interrupted.

Diversion: One of the quickest ways to reduce stress is to divert your attention to something else, or to remove yourself from the stress situation temporarily. This can be something as simple as chewing a stick of gum to taking an elaborate vacation. Sports or physical activities are excellent, especially to combat purely mental stress. If you are

reaching your critical stress level, you will have to make a considerable effort to replace your tension and anxiety with another activity. Turn your attention to a totally new situation, in new surroundings if possible.

Remember to Forget: Trying to remember too many things is one of the major sources of stress. Don't burden your memory, even for an hour. Jot down everything that is not vital to the task at hand. Keep an on-going list of things to do. Set up some files for information that might be of value later on -- be sure they are of the pocket design that will take odd-sized slips of paper. When you think of something you'd like to remember, write it down and drop it in the file. Make a conscious effort to forget immediately everything that is unimportant, and keep your memory free for only what is essential.

Prepare for a Good Night's Sleep: A stressful activity which sets up self-maintaining tensions keeps you awake. If you get keyed up too much, especially during the later hours of the day, your stress reaction may carry over into the night. As the afternoon progresses, clear up your tasks for the day, level off, and don't schedule any meetings or activities that will cause conflict or anxiety. Set limits and stick to them. Don't keep with an activity until you are exhausted. Stop and reschedule for a definite time so you won't worry all night about how you will get something done. If you finish a task ahead of schedule, treat yourself to some time off. Clean up those low-priority tasks that you have been laying aside. Catch up correspondence, make some phone calls. Don't look for something to get your wound up at the end of the day.

Imagery or Behavior Rehearsal: Dr. Richard Suinn, a psychologist who has developed a technique called, "anxiety management training" recommends the use of imagery to break the emotional reactions triggered by pressures you often encounter. First relax, using one of the above techniques. Then imagine yourself facing a situation that normally makes you tense. Suppose you re-experience the pressure that builds up when you are facing a deadline. As you imagine the situation, retain the awareness of relaxation. Repeat this several times, each time imagine yourself handling the situation calmly. Mentally rehearse new ways of reacting to it, such as pointing out the demands on your time, assigning priorities to tasks, delegating some portions of the task to others, completing the project successfully and on time. Stop the stress-associated scene if it makes you feel more tense than relaxed. Repeat this until you can go through the entire scene without feeling any tension.

The next time you feel tension building, remember how you felt when you imagined yourself handling a stress situation calmly. Relive those feelings. Use some of the things you rehearsed to meet the present crisis. A new way of doing something is never acquired unless it is practiced. You must apply the ideas you imagined to actual pressures on the job.

MANAGING STRESS IN THE WORK UNIT

As has been discussed, the professional must be concerned not only with his or her stress, but with stress as it affects co-workers and other employees. There are several things that we, as professionals, can do to enhance challenge (eustress) and minimize stress in the work unit:

1. We can get to know the people we work with. What is their disposition toward the work? Are they capable of doing what we ask?
2. We can analyze the situation. Is the task complicated or simple? What are the time constraints? What is the context surrounding this job?
3. We can fit the right person to the job. This involves matching people to the situation.
4. We can set realistic goals for the organization and for the people we are working with. Targets should be high, but within the capacity of the people who will do the job.
5. We can recognize signs of stress in others and reduce pressure when they appear.
6. We can identify traits in ourselves that induce stress in others. Sometimes, this involves annoying habits which we may not be aware of. In other situations, we may be unaware of the concerns that others have about getting the work done.
7. We can confront conflict. When conflicts appear, ignoring them will just produce more stress. It's usually better to deal with conflicts straightforwardly, carefully, and soon.

All of these approaches to managing stress in others presume an open and supportive climate in which you can communicate with members of your group and ask for feedback. When in doubt, ask questions. This will help you test the reality of your perceptions and those of others.

TYPE A AND TYPE B PERSONALITIES

Some behavioral scientists and physicians believe that a person's life style and behavior affect the way he or she reacts to pressure, challenge, and stress. Cardiologists Dr. Meyer Friedman and Dr. Ray Rosenman of the Harold Brunn Institute for Cardiovascular Research in San Francisco have written about a behavioral pattern that is likely to produce heart attack or health problems, and which requires attention in managing stress.

This behavior pattern is referred to as "Type A." The opposite of the Type A behavior is called "Type B." Some characteristics of these two personality types are:

Type "A" Personality	Type "B" Personality
Intense drive to get things done. Lives by the clock. Always in a hurry. Impatient when things move slowly. Self-imposed deadlines. Responds to stress by working harder and faster. Reacts to situations that others ignore. Works overtime to finish a task, or stays awake worrying about it. Tends to rush, and to hurry others.	Does not desire to beat the clock. Able to relax even under stress. Knows the value of taking a break. Able to walk away from a task at the end of the day, forget about it, and finish it later. Rarely rushes. Does not try to hurry others.

The business and professional world tends to encourage and reward Type A behavior. Everyone wants people to work harder and harder, to get more and more done. Type A responses are usually rewarded with no recognition of the toll this behavior takes on a person's health over time.

The examples given above are extremes, of course, meant to illustrate a behavior pattern that not only responds negatively to stress, but creates its own additional stress. Different events will create different behaviors in all of us, depending on our perceptions, our disposition, and the situation.

Our personal behavior patterns are difficult to change. But it is important to recognize habitual Type A behavior so we can slow our pace temporarily. A vacation, a short break from the work setting, or just "doing nothing" for a little while will renew energy and increase productivity in the long run.

JOB STRESS AND WORKER BURNOUT INDICATORS

Watch for these signs and symptoms of burnout in yourself and in your fellow professionals; and take appropriate action to reduce stress as needed.

1. Lack of desire or resistance to going to work every day.
2. Feelings of failure, anger and resentment.
3. Discouragement and indifference toward work and clients.
4. Isolation and withdrawal from co-workers.
5. Continually feeling tired and exhausted, including fatigue after work.
6. Frequent clock-watching.
7. Increasingly negative feelings toward clients.
8. Resisting or postponing client contacts.
9. Stereotyping or not listening to needs of clients.
10. Inability to concentrate on what client is saying.
11. Feeling overwhelmed and unable to act.
12. Cynicism about clients.
13. Putting "the book" ahead of client service and needs.
14. Avoiding discussion of work with co-workers and other professionals.
15. Self-preoccupation, suspicion of others.
16. Increased approval of behavior-control measures such as tranquilizers for clients.
17. Frequent colds and flu, frequent headaches.
18. Increased rigidity in thinking and resistance to change.
19. Excessive use of drugs and alcohol.
20. Marital, family and other interpersonal conflict.
21. High absenteeism, or sharp decrease in productivity.
22. Working harder, yet getting less done.
23. Forgetting things (appointments, anniversaries, etc.)
24. Feeling detached from others.
25. Taking yourself too seriously.

If you or others in your organizations exhibit five or more of these symptoms, it may be time to evaluate your lifestyle and your work load.

Adapted From: Cherniss, 1980, (p.17)

SOURCES OF STRESS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL

<p>ORGANIZATIONAL STRESSORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional values, goals, policies • Structure of Organization • Budget Limitations • Limitations on Power • Restrictions on Behavior • Expectations of Larger Society • Expectations of Clients 	<p>STRESSORS FROM YOUR ROLE IN THE ORGANIZATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for Professional Development, Advancement • Amount of Participation in Decision-Making, Policy Setting • Scope of Responsibility • Role Conflict/Ambiguity • Intra-Institutional Politics • Job Security • Time Pressures and Constraints • Amount of Work Load
<p>INDIVIDUAL/PERSONAL STRESSORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality • Temperament and Disposition • Leadership Style • Tolerance for Ambiguity • Adaptability to Change • Physical Health • Motivation, Needs, Drives, Ambitions 	<p>EXTERNAL STRESSORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of Control Outside Agencies • Changing Clientele • Community Pressures/Involvement • Decreasing Membership, Clients • New and Changing Manpower Needs • New Fields, Areas, Disciplines • Special Interest Groups
<p>FAMILY AND SOCIETY STRESSORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Demands • Personal Development • Personal Interests • Recreational Needs • Civic Duties • Social Relationships and Activities • Community Organizations 	<p>MANAGERIAL/ORGANIZATIONAL STYLE STRESSORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with your Supervisors • Relationships with Colleagues and Subordinates • Problem Solving Ability • Ability to Delegate Responsibility • Ability to Model Desired Behaviors

PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE

Rate yourself on the following statements using a scale of 1 to 5. 1 means the statement never applies to you and 5 means that it always applies to you. Use 2 to indicate that it rarely applies, and 4 to mean it often applies. A score of 3 means that it sometimes applies to you.

Statement	Rating Scale
1. I love a challenge. The more demanding, the better.	1 2 3 4 5
2. I speak rapidly.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I get right to the point. I dislike having to explain details to someone.	1 2 3 4 5
4. I hate deadlines. They put me under pressure.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Anything worth doing is worth doing well.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Other people would describe me as impatient.	1 2 3 4 5
7. My hands fidget constantly when I am listening.	1 2 3 4 5
8. I know what I want, and I go for it.	1 2 3 4 5
9. I walk fast, with a sense of purpose.	1 2 3 4 5
10. I "blow up" frequently.	1 2 3 4 5
11. Questionnaires like this one annoy me.	1 2 3 4 5
12. I have to be nearly dying to stay in bed.	1 2 3 4 5
13. I get angry when I can't fix something.	1 2 3 4 5
14. I have trouble sleeping.	1 2 3 4 5
15. I like to get things done right away so they aren't hanging over my head.	1 2 3 4 5
16. I am always in a hurry.	1 2 3 4 5
17. I drive fast, and often pass other cars. I get tense if I am stuck in traffic.	1 2 3 4 5
18. When I am given several tasks at once, I get uptight.	1 2 3 4 5
19. I usually do more than one thing at a time (talk on the phone and read the mail, watch TV and read the paper, etc.)	1 2 3 4 5
20. My desk is cluttered.	1 2 3 4 5
21. I am a "packrat." The more things I have, the better.	1 2 3 4 5
22. I like to keep busy.	1 2 3 4 5
23. I get annoyed with people who beat around the bush or won't get to the point.	1 2 3 4 5
24. I use my days off to do work around the house, like weeding or washing the car. After all, somebody has to do it!	1 2 3 4 5
25. I feel I will never get caught up.	1 2 3 4 5

Now that you have responded to all of the statements, draw a line from one to the next, connecting all of the answers. If your line travels mainly through fours and fives, you should consider using some techniques for coping with stress that will help lessen the effects of stress on your health.

(Adapted from Bryan, 1980)

IMAGERY -- OR BEHAVIORAL REHEARSAL

Instructions:

First, relax. Take some deep breaths and let your mind go blank.

Choose an actual incident that triggered an emotional reaction in you recently, resulting in stress. This could be a conflict with another person at work, a deadline, extra work. Try to select something that happens repeatedly.

Now imagine the situation, retaining the awareness of relaxation. Play the scene through, imagining yourself handling things calmly. What could you have substituted in words or behavior that would have changed your reactions? the reactions of others? Imagine yourself saying and doing these things. Look for better ways to react, to organize, to handle the demands on your time and energy.

Repeat the scene several times, each time imagining yourself handling the situation calmly. Stop the stress-associated scene if it makes you feel more tense than relaxed. Repeat the process until you can go through the entire scene without feeling any tension.

Describe an incident that recently resulted in stress and anxiety:

Some things I could have said and done that would have helped me to handle the situation calmly:

CHANGING SELF-TALK TO REDUCE STRESS

Instructions: Consider, for a moment, that we can cause our own unhappiness in many situations; that it is our reactions to people and events that increases our stress. How can we use our ability to change our reactions, to control anxiety and hurt feelings, in the following situations:

1. A colleague tells you that one of your co-workers said you were incompetent and your work was not up to the standard of the department.
 - a) What would be your first reaction -- your self-talk?

 - b) How could you change these sentences to control your reaction to the other person's words or actions?

2. Your manager calls you on the carpet for "not pulling your weight" on a recent project, and you feel you worked hard on the project.
 - a) What would be your first reaction -- your self-talk?

 - b) How could you change these sentences to control your reaction to the manager's words or actions?

3. A subordinate ignores your request to provide some vital material need for a report. The person's response when you ask for the material is: "I didn't know you needed it now." As a result, you miss your deadline.
 - a) What would be your first reaction -- your self-talk?

 - b) How could you change these sentences to control your reactions to the subordinate's words or actions?

THE HOLMES-RAHE SCALE

Instructions: Please enter the number of times each Life Event has occurred to you during the previous two years; then multiply the Life Crisis Units by the Number of Occurrences, entering your total score in the last column. Thus, if you were divorced twice during the two-year period, then the score for “Divorce” is $2 \times 73 = 146$.

LIFE EVENTS	Life Crisis Units		Number of Occurrences	Total Scores
Death of spouse	100	x		
Divorce	73	x		
Marital separation	65	x		
Jail term	63	x		
Death of close family member	63	x		
Personal injury or illness	53	x		
Marriage	50	x		
Fired at work	47	x		
Marital reconciliation	45	x		
Retirement	45	x		
Change in health of a family member	44	x		
Pregnancy	40	x		
Sex Difficulties	39	x		
Gain of new family member	39	x		
Business readjustment	39	x		
Change in financial state	38	x		
Death of close friend	37	x		
Change to different line of work	36	x		
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	x		
Mortgage over \$100,000	31	x		
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	x		
Change in responsibilities at work	29	x		
Son or daughter leaving home	29	x		
Trouble with in-laws	29	x		

Outstanding personal achievement	28	X		
Wife begins or stops work	26	X		
Begin or end school	26	X		
Change in living conditions	25	X		
Revision in personal habits	24	X		
Trouble with boss	23	X		
Change in work hours or conditions	20	X		
Change in residence	20	X		
Change in schools	20	X		
Change in recreation	19	X		
Change in church activities	19	X		
Change in social activities	18	X		
Mortgage or loan less than \$30,000	17	X		
Change in sleeping habits	16	X		
Change in number of family get-togethers	15	X		
Change in eating habits	15	X		
Vacation	13	X		
Christmas alone	12	X		
Minor violations of the law	11	X		

Analysis:

After you have completed the Life Events Survey, analyze your score. If your score is less than 150 points for the two-year period, you have a 37 percent chance of developing a serious illness. If your score is between 150 and 300, your chances of developing a serious illness increase to 51 percent. If your score is over 300 you are in the 80th percentile and are highly vulnerable to developing serious illness.

If you find that you have had several major stress-producing events, you should realize that you are in the danger zone. You may not have an adequate supply of energy to cope with additional difficult situations, and this may affect your work performance. Your resistance to disease may even be lowered. There are some things you can do to alleviate your situation. Postpone any additional major changes in your professional and personal life. Delay major purchases or investments that might cause financial worries; wait a while before moving into a new house or apartment. Have a thorough medical checkup and plan a restful vacation.