



LEADERSHIP HEADQUARTERS

Strategies for Managing Stress

ELIMINATE THE STRESSORS YOU CAN

It may not be possible to get rid of all your stress, even if you want to, but you might be surprised by how much you can alleviate. A good place to start is by tracking all of the causes of additional stress and anxiety at work. The problem could be certain times or situations, such as the end of the month. You can't remove deadlines, but you can organise to lighten your workload at that time. As you review your stress list, you should also consider if there are things on it that you can reduce or pass on to someone else. Finally, there are always people or situations that appear to cause more stress than others. It may be someone who is always whining or a particularly challenging client. It may be possible for you to bypass these stressors and have someone else deal with them. Someone else may not be as bothered by these people or situations as you are.

What stressors can you eliminate?

CHANGE THE SITUATIONS YOU CAN

If you are unable to eliminate all stressful situations, you may be able to change some of them. This may mean being more assertive, acting before the problems get too big. Voicing your concerns when a person, place or thing is bothering you is one way you can achieve this. While it may not be able to change the situation completely, the way you react to the situation may help you feel less stressed and overwhelmed. One part of your work environment that you are likely to have autonomy over is your schedule at work. If driving in peak hour makes you crazy, try coming in a little earlier or a little later. If you are being spread too thin at work, then adjust your schedule to make it work for you.

What situations can you change and how?

ACCEPT THE STRESS YOU CANNOT CHANGE

You can't eliminate all stress at work especially if it is caused by a severe economic downturn or even a major increase in sales. These stressors are a part of the natural cycle of ups and downs in working life. Many people learn to accept workplace stress in the course of their job, for example, air traffic controllers who learn not to get too excited even as planes circle their heads at 33,000 feet. Learning to accept natural work stress will give you more energy to deal with stress that comes from other areas of your life, in and outside of work. While complaining about stress may make you feel good for a while, learning how to accept it will last you a lifetime.

What stress can you accept? Why?

LEARN TO RELAX

Believe it or not but you can learn to relax, in the office and other parts of your life. Lifestyle changes are a great way to facilitate this. Setting aside specific 'relaxation times' at various points during the day can help you take a huge step in the right direction. These relaxation times don't have to be too long, but they do need to be safe from outside influence. For example, if you decide to take a break at lunchtime, don't then sit at your desk and answer emails or be available in the case of an emergency. Get up, get out of the office and do something. Do something that you actually enjoy like reading a book, or listening to music, something that is just for you. You will be amazed at how well this will improve your mood and better deal with the stress that has been waiting for you.

How can you learn to relax? What will you do to put this in place? When?



FIND HEALTHY STRESS RELIEVERS

Many of have found unhealthy coping mechanisms for dealing with stress. These include; drinking, smoking, overeating or just collapsing in front of the television. We need to replace those unhealthy coping mechanisms with healthy stress relievers. This may mean reducing the amount of your current smoking, drinking, and eating, adopting a healthy diet and getting regular exercise. Moderate exercise for thirty minutes, three times a week has been proven not only to reduce stress but to help you feel better overall. Coffee and sugar are the main stress relievers in the modern office but their effect is temporary,

INSTANT STRESS RELIEF

There will be times in which you don't have the ability to unwind fully; in these situations, you will need a couple of instant stress relief techniques. One great technique for your stress relief toolbox is a form of breathing exercise. This can be as simple as taking three long breaths and holding them in before you exhale, or more complex manoeuvres. Anything that slows down your breathing will contribute to alleviating stress.

Another good technique is practicing stretching and bending in the privacy of your office. You can also go for a walk around the building; something that will cause your mind to become distracted from your worries, even for just a few minutes. Another great technique is 'mindfulness' – being in the present moment. I have included an article on this area for your review. There are hundreds of other active self-relief strategies that you can try and keep looking for them and trying them out until you find one that works for you. Then, share it with others.

THE FOLLOWING IS FROM A GREAT BLOG CALLED SHARE THIS WITH YOUR CEO FROM THE HBR BLOG BY TONY SCHWARTZ.

(Source - <https://theenergyproject.com/blog/share-your-ceo>)

“Recently, I was giving a talk to 160 senior executives at a large bank. As part of the talk, I asked them to fill out something we call “The Energy Audit”, (refer to the Chapter Summary for Internet Link) as a way of assessing how well they are managing their own energy. It happened that they had access to individual polling devices, so we were able to aggregate their answers and show them on the screen in the front of the room.

Here is some of what we discovered:

77% said they had trouble focusing on one thing at a time and felt easily distracted during the day.

80% said they take too little time to think strategically and creatively and spend too much of their time reacting to immediate demands rather than focusing on activities with long-term value and higher leverage.

and the downs from the highs they provide may even stress you more. Try herbal tea and take a few minutes' walk. It is amazing what fresh air can do for the brain.

What are your healthy stress relievers?

54% said they often feel impatient, frustrated or irritable at work, especially when demand gets high.

How surprising is it that leaders with such a profile would make short-sighted and ill-considered decisions? The pictures those numbers paint ought to be alarming. Nor are these bankers a bunch of outliers. Over the past three years, we've given the same audit to tens of thousands of leaders and managers across dozens of companies in multiple industries and the results have been remarkably consistent - and similar to the bankers above.

We believe the most fundamental explanation is an under-recognised personal energy crisis. Energy, after all, is the capacity to do work. In the face of relentlessly rising demand, fuelled by digital technology and the expectation of instant 24/7 responsiveness, employees around the world are increasingly burning down their energy reserves and depleting their capacity.

Consider these further findings from the audit of the bankers above:

- **82%** reported they regularly get fewer than 7-8 hours of sleep and often wake up feeling tired
- **70%** don't take regular breaks during the day to renew and refuel
- **70%** eat lunch at their desks, if they eat lunch at all
- **65%** don't consistently work out
- **68%** said they don't have enough time with their families and loved ones, and when they're with them, they're not always really with them
- **71%** take too little time for the activities they most deeply enjoy.

Put simply, these leaders are spending more energy than they're taking in. Do that with money, and you ultimately go bankrupt. Do it with your energy and you'll eventually be running on empty.

