

Techniques For Minimizing STRESSES

BY JEFF DAVIDSON, MBA, CMC

STRESS! THE WORD itself often can be stressful. If you find yourself experiencing stress with increasing frequency, here are some proven techniques for getting back in stride:

Volunteer.

Serving others helps you to increase your self-respect and sense of accomplishment. Studies show that volunteers actually add years to their lives. When you stay in isolation your worries intensify. So, serve soup.

Improve your posture.

Have you noticed that you begin to slouch when you get a phone call, or you slink further and further into the easy chair when you watch television? The body was made to be upright and erect. When you talk, eat, walk and sit with full and proper extension, your systems work better and minor stresses melt away.

Reduce some of your costs.

Living beyond your means is one of the most stressful forms of existence in our society. What can you do right now to eliminate some onerous monthly expenses? Can you trade in your car? Can you sell vacation property? Can you eliminate subscriptions? Take a look at what you don't need.

Build slack into your schedule.

Paradox among people is that the more they achieve, the more they believe they can achieve, and with less effort. If you think something is

going to take two hours, plan on it taking three and schedule accordingly. This is a great stress reducer. If you finish in far less than three, fine.

Drink water.

Half the time, when you're under stress, simply taking a sip of water will immediately make you feel better. A dry mouth seems to accompany many types of anxious situations. Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate.

Twist and shout.

Obviously physical movement is helpful. You can take a walk around the block, stretch right within your office, and use the stairs instead of the elevators. After work, blow off steam by going places where it's okay to yell. Sports bars, baseball games, conventions, and pep rallies. By the way, when barreling down the highway alone in your car, some therapeutic yelling there will help to reduce stress as well.

Buy a hand gripper.

A tennis ball, a racquetball, or a hand-gripper at your desk is a marvelous stress reducer. Squeeze it when you feel tense to achieve a release. This action responds to adrenaline in your bloodstream by getting your muscles in action.

Buy a joke book.

If "The Far Side" by Gary Larson or "Cathy" by Cathy Guisewhite brings a smile to your face, keep such cartoons within easy reach. One good laugh, and your whole temperament can change, plummeting the stress

you feel back down to manageable levels.

Contemplate pleasant thoughts.

Whether it's a waterfall, the picnic you had last Sunday, what it will be like when you're next with your lover, or getting a \$10,000 check in the mail, visualization can calm the mind and soothe the soul. You don't have to get heavily into meditation or yoga, simply develop the ability to take two to five minutes out of your day to peer out the window, or simply close your eyes. Get into a quiet space, and feel good about aspects of your life.

Turn off your information receptors.

For several hours each day do not let new information invade your being if it doesn't promise immediate benefit to you, your family, community, or any area of your life, or if it comes after hours. Give yourself permission to go a whole Saturday or Sunday without reading anything.

Become a wise information consumer.

At all points, there is only one party who controls the volume, rate, and frequency of information that you're exposed to. That person is you. The notion of "keeping up" is illusory, self-defeating, frustrating and harmful. The sooner you give it up the better you'll feel.

Sit still.

For the next minute, stare at your watch, or if that's too boring, think about something pleasurable you're

going to do today. Your perception of the length of a minute will differ vastly from using that minute to listen to the news or read a page from a magazine.

Use visualization.

Tomorrow morning when getting ready for work rather than switching on the radio or TV, quietly envision how you would like your day to be. Include everything that's important to you—the commute, entering your building or your office, sitting down at your desk, handling tasks, and taking breaks.

Envision interacting with others, going to lunch, conducting or attending meetings, using the phone, finishing up projects, and walking out in the evening. With this exercise alone, you'll begin to feel a greater sense of control in aspects of your job that you may have considered uncontrollable.

Ignore the spectacular.

Unless it directly affects you or your community, give up offering any attention, whatsoever, to news coverage of spectacular crashes, train wrecks, etc. If you're concerned about reducing the incidence of violent death, learn the Heimlich maneuver or CPR. Stop being enthralled, however, by spectacular media coverage of non-imperative events and sensationalized trivia.

Pick a cause.

Choose one cause or one issue, and take some kind of action outside your home. There is little utility in intellectually resonating with the world's challenges and problems. Action is customarily invigorating. Your ability to make a real, if minute, difference will immediately lessen your concerns about attaining some breathing space.

Clear your in-bins.

Regard each piece of paper that enters your personal kingdom as a potential mutineer, rebel, or disloyal subject. Every piece of paper has to earn its keep and remain worthy of your attention. Were it to speak, it would have to immediately convey its value to you. If it could not, it has to volunteer for recycling, where it as the chance of coming back to you someday.

Make less decisions.

Whenever you catch yourself making a low level decision, consider: does this really make a difference? Get in the habit of making only a few decisions a day—the ones that count.

Don't merge with your tasks.

Remember, you are whole and complete right now. Everything on your "to-do" list, even at the workplace, is undertaken at your option. You are not your tasks; they don't define you and they don't constrain you.

Don't handle it all.

On a deeply felt personal level, recognize that from now on, you will be subjected to an ever-increasing number of items competing for your attention. You cannot handle everything, nor is making the attempt desirable.

Recognize with the clarity of death, that your life is finite; you can no longer wistfully take in the daily deluge and expect to achieve balance. You cannot submissively yield to the din, and settle for living your life in what's left over after each day's onslaught. Make sensible choices regarding what is best ignored and what merits your attention.

Prolific author and professional speaker Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC, based in Chapel Hill, NC, spent 11 years developing and refining the insights and solutions included in his book, Breathing Space: Living & Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-Up Society. Jeff speaks to about 80 groups annually on what consumes our time and space and how to regain control.