

STRESSED

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Are you stressed? Isn't everyone these days? Every aspect of life seems to be accelerated and we are all experiencing increasing pressure and change while feeling a lack of control. In fact, stress is simply a body's response to change – you can experience physical, emotional and cognitive symptoms as a result of the stressor. It hits you on all fronts. Stress can leave you more vulnerable to illness. It's important to note that a stressor can be a good event – it isn't just the bad stuff – but today, we'll just talk about the stressors that are upsetting.

What is bugging you now? Is it a reorg, health issues, a layoff, a child going off to college, financial challenges? Whatever it is, we tend to make the stress worse for ourselves in two ways; stressful thinking and stressful behavior. It isn't bad enough that life has thrown us a curve; we actually have a natural tendency under stress to make things worse.

What is stressful thinking? Imagine that you hear that your business didn't do so well this quarter. Stressful thinking takes you from this concrete information to a belief that layoffs are coming, that you will be one of them, all the way to homelessness. Our worst tendencies come out in our thinking under stress. We also layer on a lot of "shoulds."

Stressful behavior also shows up – it often can be seen as "career-limiting behaviors." As an example, as layoffs start occurring, one employee spends his whole day worrying and analyzing the minutiae of his performance. The next person starts complaining which shows them not to be a team player. Another promptly gets ill. Another one mouths off to management. All these behaviors are more likely to lead to getting your name on the list.

So now we know how bad stress is on us and how we make it worse. How do we fix it? There are a number of strategies; you will find that one or more work best for you depending on the type of stress.

- Get 8 good hours of sleep
- Exercise every day – walk
- Eat well
- Laugh every day
- Recognize before you crack and don't let yourself go that far
- Analyze the stress objectively
- Talk to a friend

What else can you do, especially if you go past your breaking point?

- Take a breath
- Focus on the next minute or the next hour (not next week)
- Try muscle relaxation exercises
- Try other strategies like meditation, guided imagery and more

For most of us, prevention is better. For a work situation, try the following:

- Keep an up to date resume
- Interview regularly
- Manage/plan your time mindfully
- Understand your limits and communicate them
- Work on becoming more assertive
- Understand what you can and cannot control – let go
- Aim for balance in your life (which means turns off that Blackberry)
- Spend time with friends, family and pets

Stress is inevitable, but debilitation is a choice. Seize control of the day and manage your reaction to stress.