



# **Leadership Tips**

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## **How to reduce your stress and its affect on others**

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The customer service manager was noticing that her new hire, who was brimming with enthusiasm upon being hired by the city, was now showing signs of irritability, frustration, and fatigue. Her people skills had seemed strong based on her interview, reference check and training that accompanied onboarding. Yet two months later she was a different person. In their next one-to-one meeting, her manager used some probing questions to try to solve the mystery.

Over time, the new hire's negative in-person and telephone interactions with citizens were slowly taking a toll on her self-image and self-esteem. The stress of daily verbal abuse from disgruntled counter customers and callers, and the pressure to please them, had taken the fun out of her job. With coaching and extra training in dealing with difficult people, she was able to resume good service after this initial challenge.

## **STRESS ABOUNDS**

Workforce stress manifests itself in many ways. It affects men and women, supervisors and direct reports, new hires and veterans. Left unchecked, stress can result in burnout,

depression, or worse. The good news: we know its warning signs; we know remedies; and we know how to replace negative reactive behaviors with healthy reactions. There's no need to distress over stress.

## **Stress in the Workplace**

Stress - a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances - can be externally or internally induced. It can be short lived, or a slowly built up. Stress manifests itself differently in each person. For some, studying for a driving test can be stressful. For others, it's giving a speech, or presenting an annual budget to City Council, or working with a bully. For leaders, it can be having to reprimand or even fire an employee, or make difficult budget cuts, or make unpopular decisions about people, projects, or priorities.

## **How Stress Are You?**

Take a moment to consider how much stress you are under at this very moment. What is exerting pressure on you?

*First focus on your workplace:*

- Deadlines
- Schedules
- Lack of resources
- Cell phone, text interruptions
- Excessive emails
- Lack of resources
- Unreturned phone calls or emails
- Missing data
- An unresolved interpersonal situation
- A delinquent annual review
- Stress related to
  - those you report to
  - those who report to you
- An unhealthy work environment

*Now factor in stress induced from pressures outside of work:*

- Responsibilities to your partner
- Stress related to friends or relatives
- Issues with neighbors
- Money issues
- Health issues (your own and those of others in your life)
- Community issues
- Governmental decisions

Finally, factor in pressure from other sources.

*Which of these add to your stress level:*

- Reading the news, social media
- Watching /listening to
  - TV and radio news
  - talk and political shows
- Too many emails
- Hallway conversations
- Commuting
- Rising taxes and fees

As you can see, there can be many causes and sources of stress in our lives. Recognizing them is an important first step in addressing them. In fact, many people are more stressed than they realize. Does this include you?

*Do you exhibit any of these symptoms on a regular basis?*

- Irritability
- Frustration
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feelings of fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Impatience
- Lack of energy for previously fun activities
- Apathy

Stress gone unchecked can lead to a variety of negative consequences, such as illness or shorter life span. Yet when recognized and addressed, you can relive and reduce stress to manageable levels and restore your own equilibrium.

One employee was a survivor of a recent California wildfire where his family lost their home, pet, and all of their possessions. Yet he insisted on continuing on a project

he was in the middle of leading. He was distracted, had trouble sleeping and was clearly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. But he didn't see it.

Stoic by nature, he thought he was being valiant and supporting his team but was soon over-reacting to what normally were little annoyances. He began making mistakes and letting details fall through the cracks.

Finally, a misunderstanding led to a nasty public scene with a co-worker who was also a dear friend. The coworker filed a formal complaint, and after a short leave of absence, the employee returned with a high level of productivity. Sometimes cumulative stress can explode like a volcano if not alleviated.

Managers who are stressed often unintentionally pass stress along to their direct reports. And stressed co-workers unintentionally create a ripple effect among the office team.

## **WAYS TO ADDRESS STRESS**

Once we recognize the large and small pressures that are stressing us out, it's time to address the stress in our lives.

Analyze your list. What can you ignore? What can you change? What can you get help with? What is temporary, what is short-term, and what has long term implications? Where will you put your efforts? Where will you apply your time, energy and worry?

### **Back to Basics At Work:**

- Schedule time for yourself
- Blend solitary thinking and analytical time with interactions with colleagues
- Practice mindfulness
- Use deep breathing to restore calm after an adverse interaction to calm and refocus
- Seek sunshine, solitude or a social interlude periodically during each day
- Monitor your own well-being with a mirror

- Take a 5-minute catnap to relieve pressure and re-energize
- Don't skip meals
- Allow more humor

## **Many Hands Make for Light Work**

In the workplace, consider asking for help or exploring a collaborative partnership when your to-do list or ongoing project list gets too long.

As a supervisor or manager, consider the benefits of delegating some tasks or projects. Doing so can be a win-win as you strengthen others skills and free yourself for more pressing assignments.

## **Back to Basics at Home: Eat, Sleep, Love, Pray, Exercise, Recreate...**

To preempt stress, try to live a balanced life. Medically, emotionally and spiritually, we know that we thrive when we nurture ourselves and have healthy doses of the following:

- Uninterrupted sleep (including short naps)
- Balanced meals at regular intervals
- Exercise (can include dance, Yoga, Pilates, hiking, walking, bicycling, etc.)
- Time for Contemplation (prayer, meditation, time in nature)
- Creative time to express yourself
- Volunteering
- Spending time with children
- Receiving unconditional love from our dogs, cats, birds and other non-human companions

## **First Things First**

Dr. Stephen Covey taught us long ago to prioritize and make sure to put our boulders (big projects) into our jar before filling it with rocks, pebbles and sand (the less important jobs, tasks and administrivia). He also invoked the Eisenhower principle of being able to focus first on what is both important and urgent, then important and non-

urgent, and try to delegate or ignore what is neither urgent nor important, respectively.

## **More on Mindfulness**

Stress derives in large part from our worrying about the past and future, and giving in to the many pressures surrounding us. One remedy is to increase our mindfulness. Learning how to be and remain present is a gift we give ourselves. It takes practice. So practice.

Stress has a tendency to build up without announcing itself. Look for ways to reduce your stress levels before they approach volcanic proportions. Your body, mind and colleagues will all benefit.

## **Positive Mental Outlook**

Oftentimes we place the weight of the world on our own shoulders. It's important to recognize the difference between the things we can control and those we can't. And controlling, let alone changing other people is even more unlikely. Yet we can often control our own reactions.

It starts with our own attitude. Each day we all wake up with a choice of how we'll embrace the new day. See the glass at least half full; strive for equanimity; employ appreciative inquiry to build on what's already working; try to catch people doing things right; and praise accordingly.

You'll find your positive attitude is contagious; its ripple effect will wash over others and you'll be helping to relieve stress of all those you encounter in your midst.

**Congratulations.**



**COACHING:**

Do you have a leader or employee in need of coaching to improve their leadership, communication skills (including listening skills), emotional intelligence, or customer service proficiency? *Let us help.*

### **RELATED MEDIATION AND COACHING SERVICES FROM TCT:**

[Conflict Mediation](#)

- [Diffusing Bullying Behavior Through Coaching](#)

- [Managing Stress, Anger and Frustration Through Coaching](#)

- [Emotional Intelligence: Executive Coaching and Assessment](#)

- [Coaching and Feedback for Increased Performance](#)

[Coaching Employees for Success](#)

[Emotional Intelligence: Executive Coaching and Assessment](#)

### **ASSESSMENT TOOLS:**

- [DiSC ® Classic Communication Style Assessments](#)

[Emotional Intelligence: Executive Coaching and Assessment](#)

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### **RELATED TRAININGS:**

- [Stress Management Training](#)

- [Critical Conversations](#)

- [Making Time and Priorities](#)

- [Managing Change](#)

[Supervision and Management 101](#)

[Think On Your Feet: Develop Your Ability to Think, Stand and Speak in Spontaneously](#)



Contact The Consulting Team to learn more about training and consulting assistance and also one-to-one coaching for leaders and employees.

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