

From Stressed to Resilient – Developing the Gift of Mental Toughness

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Defining Stress

Can we define what we mean by stress? Stress is our mental, physical, and behavioral response to anxiety-producing events. Too much stress can result in serious physical, psychological, interpersonal, or performance problems.

The amount of stress that we experience depends on how much stress we have, how long we have it, and how we are able to manage it.

Not all stress is bad. Positive stress motivates, increases energy levels, and can drive people forward to embrace the work before them.



Can you make a list of good and bad stressors you are facing right now?

The Costs of Stress

Costs of stress at work can include:

- Errors
- Absenteeism
- Conflict
- Low morale
- High staff turnover
- Poor decisions/no decisions
- Accidents and Injuries

The physical and mental symptoms of stress can include:

- High blood pressure
- Risk of heart attack
- Risk of a stroke
- Risk of diabetes
- Migraines
- Always tired
- Always angry
- Not feeling much of anything

Let's Measure your current stress level? (Holmes-Rahe Stress Rating)

Circle the events that have happened to you in the past 24 months. Then, add up your life change units and write it in the Total area provided. (You do not have to show it to anyone.)

Life Event (During Past 24 Months)	Life Change Units
Begin or end school	26
Business readjustment	39
Change in church activities	19
Change in eating habits	15
Change in financial state	38
Change in health of family member	44
Change in living conditions	25
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
Change in number of family get-togethers	15
Change in recreation	19
Change in residence	20
Change in responsibilities at work	29
Change in schools	20
Change in sleeping habits	17
Change in social activities	19
Change in work hours or conditions	20
Change to a different line of work	36
Christmas	12
Death of a close friend	37
Death of close family member	63
Death of spouse	100

Divorce	73
Fired at work	47
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Gain of a new family member	39
Incarceration	63
Marital reconciliation	45
Marital separation	65
Marriage	50
Minor violation of the law	11
Mortgage or loan more than \$50,000	18
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Partner begins or stops work	26
Personal injury or illness	53
Pregnancy	40
Retirement	45
Revision of personal habits	24
Sexual difficulties	39
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with boss	23
Trouble with in-laws	29
Vacation	13

Your Total

The more changes you have, the more likely you are to get sick. Of those people with over 300 Life Change Units, almost 90% get sick in the near future; with 150 to 299 Life Change Units, about 50% get sick in the near future; and with less than 150 Life Change Units, only about 30% get sick in the near future.

Signs and symptoms of stress overload

The following lists some of the common warning signs and symptoms of chronic stress. The more signs and symptoms you notice in yourself, the closer you may be to stress overload.

Cognitive Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Memory problems• Inability to concentrate• Poor judgment• Seeing only the negative• Anxious or racing thoughts• Constant worrying
Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moodiness• Irritability or short temper• Agitation, inability to relax• Feeling overwhelmed• Sense of loneliness and isolation• Depression or general unhappiness
Physical Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aches and pains• Diarrhea or constipation• Nausea, dizziness• Chest pain, rapid heartbeat• Loss of sex drive• Frequent colds

Behavioral Symptoms

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Isolating yourself from others
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

Keep in mind that the signs and symptoms of stress overload can also be caused by other psychological or medical problems. If you're experiencing any of the warning signs of stress, it's important to see a doctor to help determine if your symptoms are stress-related.

Recognizing Burnout

Burnout may be the result of unrelenting stress, but it isn't the same as too much stress. Being burned out means feeling empty, devoid of motivation, and beyond caring. People experiencing burnout often don't see any hope of positive change in their situations. If excessive stress is like drowning in responsibilities, burnout is being all dried up. And while you're usually aware of being under a lot of stress, you don't always notice burnout when it happens.

Are you on the road to burnout?

You may be on the road to burnout if:

- Every day is a bad day.
- Caring about your work or home life seems like a total waste of energy.
- You're exhausted all the time.
- The majority of your day is spent on tasks you find either mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming.
- You feel like nothing you do makes a difference or is appreciated.

Your lifestyle and personality traits can contribute to burnout. What you do in your downtime and how you look at the world can play just as big a role in causing burnout as work or home demands.

How to Prevent Burnout (as well as other minor stress reactions)

“If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, then the best way to beat burnout is to keep it from happening in the first place. Not all strategies require large amounts of planning and change. In fact introducing good work routines early in one’s career can significantly reduce the likelihood of burnout. These include:

1. Keep expectations realistic
2. Reduce your workload where you can
3. Relax at work
4. Take allocated lunch breaks
5. Consider a career break if need be
6. Develop and maintain interests outside of work
7. Use your full holiday entitlement
8. Recognize your own responses to workplace issues

Know thyself

We're all different. Some people seem to be able to roll with life’s punches, while others tend to crumble in the face of far smaller obstacles or frustrations. Some people even seem to thrive on the excitement and challenge of a high-stress lifestyle.

Your ability to tolerate stress depends on many factors, including the quality of your relationships and support network, your life experiences, your emotional intelligence, and genetics.

Let’s take a moment to garner some fun quick insights into who you are as an individual:

Use this blank page to do your illustration – instructions will be provided)

5 Pillars of Stress Management



Have you ever heard the saying, “Like water off a duck’s back”? That’s what we want to do in this seminar – give you tools so that, when possible and appropriate, stress flows around you, not through you.

Mental strength involves more than just willpower; it requires hard work and commitment. It’s about establishing healthy habits and choosing to devote your time and energy to self-improvement. Choosing to develop skills that increase your mental strength is the best way to prepare for life’s inevitable obstacles.

There are 5 common pillars related to stress reduction strategies:

1. Good Nutrition
2. Exercise
3. Strong Relationships
4. Sleep
5. Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation Techniques

There are a myriad of different coping skills and relaxation techniques that people can use in their day-to-day life. Nevertheless, in order for these things to be effective you must use them, and that requires finding techniques that work with your personality type and then be consistent in deploying them. Techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body’s relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the fight or flight stress response.

Resilience – Developing the Gift of Mental Toughness

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress -- such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences/difficult people and stressful events.

Developing resilience is a personal journey. People do not all react the same to stressful life events. An approach to building resilience that works for one person might not work for another.

How do you cope when everything seems to be going wrong?

Take time to Design your own future:

A great first step strategy for re-defining your life comes from Brendon Burchard, Author of “The Charge”.

In the space below, begin generating a list of words (adjectives) that you would like to aspire to emulate in your life.

Words like: courage, tenacity, generosity, presence.

Once you have made the list, circle three that truly speak to how you want to live your life. How you want others to think of you. Define what it means for you and then live each day to that definition – to the best of your ability. Do a daily or weekly check in to evaluate your performance.

Making a conscious choice to learn how to interrupt the stress cycle and develop the courage to remain mentally tough will help you weather the inevitable stressors of your life more productively. Be sure to practice positive and proactive techniques whenever the pressure is off in order to nurture an effective stress management style when you need it most.

Interested in gaining more individualized support or receiving ongoing materials on this topic from Faith Wood? She is a Conflict and Communication Specialist and provides individualized support and coaching as well as trainings. Contact her for more individualized support or insights that can help you regain balance and passion. Visit her website at www.imind.ca email faith@imind.ca; Phone: 403-461-3498.