



TALENT JOURNEY

BUILD A TEAM • CREATE A DESTINY

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Stress: Mother Nature's Great Equalizer

The New Year brings new hopes, goals, changes, and resolutions. A common resolution when the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve is to lose weight and get fit. Additionally, it is a resolution I adopted myself. As most people know, obesity is a major health concern in America today. In fact, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 30 percent of U.S. adults 20 years of age and older are obese.

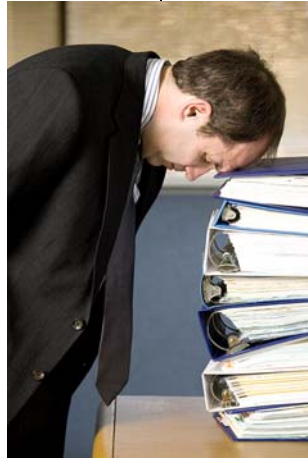
Although these are staggering numbers, a much more common, yet overlooked health issue affects all of us. Stress is the cause of 75-90 percent of all primary care physician visits according to the American Institute of Stress (AIS). These even more staggering numbers reveal stress as American's number one health problem.

The moment this became an all-important topic to me was the year that I experienced the impact of stress within my own family. My otherwise healthy brother landed in a Midwest hospital emergency room with severe chest pain. The unsuspecting victim was a 45-year-old successful businessman, dedicated husband, father, long-term athlete and baseball coach.

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Are You Managing Your Stress?

Dealing with Difficult People

We have all heard incredible tales from time to time of having to deal with difficult people in the workplace. As we listen to the antics of some, we also find that we may have a story or two to tell of our own challenging experience or difficult conversation with a seemingly unfair colleague.

How many times have we been disappointed or aggravated by a difficult colleague? Although the stories may vary,

all will tell the tale of an office mate or a manager who just doesn't "get it" or "play well with others." More often than not, when challenged or disappointed by those we spend most of our waking hours with - we often choose to retreat rather than address the unprofessional behavior. And although it is best to take the "high road", there are consequences to doing nothing at all.

Ironically, employees and managers (at all levels) will make deadlines, take on additional responsibilities and jump into any project as a great leader and team player. However, when it comes to confronting a difficult employee or manager, either they will ignore the situation completely or more dangerous, go behind the scenes and broadcast the shortcomings of another individual and their own personal misgivings about them in hopes that someone will somehow catch wind and solve the problem and/or situation.

Unfortunately, this approach usually backfires and leaves the "informant" with a poor reputation. It takes an incredible amount of patience when confronting any person, or situation for that matter, that makes us feel uncomfortable.

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Professionally, he had labored under significant stress for years. The effects of prolonged and ignored symptoms of stress resulted in chest pain that even morphine could not relieve. Fortunately, after a myriad of testing and analysis, he was released from the hospital.

My brother faced a critical choice point that could no longer be ignored: continue with his status-quo life leading to further health deterioration or take steps to eliminate and manage hazardous stress in his life. We are wired to react to stress with a fight or flight response. The pre-wired response is beneficial and productive when external stimuli threaten to harm us. However, we were not built to endure long-term negative stress. Over time, stress manifests itself and results in physical symptoms and health concerns.

The demand to work more hours, complete more tasks and adhere to pressing deadlines contributes to our nation's plague of escalating stress. According to the Harris Poll which has been tracking America's leisure time since 1973, the median number of leisure hours available each week dropped 20% in 2008, from 20 hours in 2007, to an all-time low of only 16 hours this year. Our generation is especially pressed for time and has fewer leisure hours than ever. Working long and hard, our tendency is to take very little time to refuel and revitalize ourselves. The chronic grind takes its toll if left unchecked.

It is far too common these days to accept stress as inevitable. The affect of this complacency is alarming and directly affects longevity and quality of life. What will it take to honestly evaluate your stress level and the physical effects it is taking on your own life? If you are willing, it is possible to manage stress with creative options and intentional skills.

The thought of stepping back and taking a good hard look can feel overwhelming. Here are some recommended ways to honestly evaluate your current stress level and visualize ways to change it.

Identify Options:

- Identify where your daily activities align with overall life values and priorities
- Develop agreements to reduce distractions, interruptions and irritants in your life
- Simplify life and eliminate “should do’s”
- Hire out/delegate beyond your comfort level

Continued on next column –

Develop Skills:

- Build systems of efficiency
- Honor personal values and priorities – set boundaries
- Manage energy to maximize results
- Learn to say “no”

Like anything in life, stress level is largely dependent upon individual choice points. A decision to change or to stay the same each has its own consequences. A choice made to value and respect health overall will result in benefits for you and your family. Resolve today to take control of your well-being and initiate measures to reduce the stresses in your life.

For more information on Stress, visit the American Institute of Stress at <http://www.stress.org>.

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Troubleshooting a Stagnant Meeting

Be ready to propel a meeting forward when it hits trouble spots. Here are three classic meeting problems and how to solve them:

- ✓ Problem: “*We always peter out.*” Solution: End the meeting on a high note. If 17 minutes into the meeting, you reach the climax of the gathering, stop the meeting there. That way everyone walks out revved up – and more productive.
- ✓ Problem: “*Everyone’s bored out of their minds.*” Solution: Make attendees laugh. Here’s a trick from Sheldon Arora, CEO of Esoftsolutions in Plano, Texas: The last person into the room at the monthly companywide meeting has to tell a joke. It loosens up the room and fills the seats on time.
- ✓ Problem: “*No one retains a thing.*” Solution: Do a five-minute recap at the end. You want everyone to leave knowing exactly what they’re supposed to do. Clarify potential outcomes, outline next steps and make assignments.



— Adapted from *Escape From Meeting Hell*, Patrick J. Sauer, Inc., www.inc.com

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Many times we have heard the expression “use a cool head” when voicing dissatisfaction or displeasure with another person. However, many of us do not take this advice. Emotion will push people to react too quickly and not take the time to sort through what is really bothering them most. The key to effective communication is timing. How many times have we all said after a heated exchange, “I should have said this or that?” When we take the time to analyze the problem, we are in essence, formulating a more effective plan of action and conversation. And sometimes, after thinking about the outcome and consequences of such an exchange, we find the problem as not so monumental.



Another consideration when “taking on” the difficult colleague is the organization’s unwritten rules and values. Is this issue significant enough to warrant upper level support? Has this issue surfaced before? If yes, what was the outcome – for both the confronter and confronted? You also may want to discuss the pros and cons of confronting the problem with your mentor before moving forward.

There are career enhancing and career sabotaging methods to effectively deal with and work with the difficult people. And although the difficult Do’s are much more “difficult” to execute, they are well worth it in the long run.

Difficult Do’s

- Acknowledge that you are in fact dealing with a difficult coworker and that things will not get better if ignored.
- Approach the individual in a professional manner and make an effort to confront the “right” problem.
- Carefully weigh the consequences with an outside-unbiased party (mentor) before addressing the problem.
- If the situation cannot seem to be resolved, seek the council of a supervisor and explain your concerns. When there is still no progress, request a mediation session with your supervisor and a human resource professional. This will ensure documentation of your issues, which will prove to be helpful down the road.

Difficult Don’ts

- Don’t speak ill of the difficult colleague around the water cooler or anywhere else. Those who hear you may be wondering what you are saying about them.
- Do not become emotional when confronting the difficult colleague. This approach will always make you appear to be irrational.
- Don’t downplay the cost of not speaking up when you should.

And remember, there is no reason to have to search for another job or a new career because of one challenging individual. By learning how to deal with the situation rationally and professionally, you only enhance your own reputation.

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ONE MINUTE IDEAS

Where is Your Comfort Zone?

Does the following cartoon speak to you?



The Choice Question

Are you making choices because they are in your comfort zone or are you making choices to take you where you need and desire to go?

Success

Success tends to go not to the person who is error-free, because he also tends to be risk-averse. Rather it goes to the person who recognizes that life is pretty much a percentage business. It isn't making mistakes that's critical, it's correcting them and getting on with the principal task.

– Donald Rumsfeld

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Teach Your Employees' Communication Basics

Sharpen communication between you and your staff members by following these guidelines:

- ✓ **Really listen; don't "wait to talk."** When employees are speaking, focus on what they're saying and try to understand their complete meaning. Don't let your attention wander because you're thinking about how you'll respond.
- ✓ **Be concise. Don't monopolize the conversation.** Get to the point and give employees the chance to share their ideas.
- ✓ **Keep an open mind. Reserve judgment.** Consider all points of view and possibilities before you respond.
- ✓ **Show respect.** Convey your commitment to listening through your body language as well as through your silence. Don't slouch, fiddle with papers or carry on any side conversations.
- ✓ **Seek and confirm understanding.** When you're not sure exactly what someone means, ask for clarification. Then, to confirm that you understood, summarize what you heard.
- ✓ **Appreciate more than one right answer.** Each employee brings a different perspective to the discussion. Accept that problems can have more than one solution.



Reprint permission from: *Manager's Edge*, Janelle Brittain, Oakhill Press.

The Spirit of Leadership Column

Goal Setting – It's all About Getting There!

As we begin the year with hope, promise and a handful of resolutions, we may find ourselves' sidelined before we even get started because we simply do not have a plan.

In any personal or professional enrichment endeavor, it is often the task of defining goals that can become the most elusive. We can easily contemplate where we want to be and what we want to do in the next year or two, but find much challenge in establishing what needs to be done to get there.



To successfully define those activities and actions that will get us where we want to be, we must first simply envision. Envisioning is not only a pleasurable escape, but can also become very liberating. Sometimes the best way to begin setting goals is to think about them as reality. Instead of "listing" those things that we think we *should* be doing/completing/achieving, envision those things as if they had already occurred. Envisioning is a powerful tool. We actually do it more often than we are conscious of. The problem is that we often just leave it at that. We need to take the next step – establishing concrete objectives to get us to that place we want and deserve to be.

Goal setting is essentially determining where you want to go and the steps needed to get there. It is both methodical and purposeful, but more importantly, goal setting should be fun.

When we think about setting goals, many of us look to the larger end result rather than the small steps needed to achieve the desired outcome. These small steps are critical to our long-term success and many times become wonderful achievements in and of themselves.

Admittedly, determining what steps are needed is often the most difficult task. But, if we follow the advice of the great Mark Twain we can be instantly on our way.

"The secret of getting started is breaking your complex, overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one." – Mark Twain

– Alison Sfredo, The Training Connection

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