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Stress Management

It may seem that there's nothing you can do about stress. The bills won't stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day, and your career and family responsibilities will always be demanding. But you have more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realization that you're in control of your life is the foundation of stress management. Managing stress is all about taking charge: of your thoughts, emotions, schedule, and the way you deal with problems

Identify the sources of stress in your life

Learn about hidden sources of stress

Watch 3-min. video: [Roadblocks to awareness](#)

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in your life. This isn't as easy as it sounds. Your true sources of stress aren't always obvious, and it's all too easy to overlook your own stress-inducing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Sure, you may know that you're constantly worried about work deadlines. But maybe it's your procrastination, rather than the actual job demands, that leads to deadline stress.

To identify your true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses:

- Do you explain away stress as temporary ("I just have a million things going on right now") even though you can't remember the last time you took a breather?
- Do you define stress as an integral part of your work or home life ("Things are always crazy around here") or as a part of your personality ("I have a lot of nervous energy, that's all")?
- Do you blame your stress on other people or outside events, or view it as entirely normal and unexceptional?

Until you accept responsibility for the role you play in creating or maintaining it, your stress level will remain outside your control.

Look at how you currently cope with stress

Think about the ways you currently manage and cope with stress in your life. Your stress journal can help you identify them. Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unproductive? Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in ways that compound the problem.

Unhealthy ways of coping with stress

These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or undereating
- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
- Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)

Learning healthier ways to manage stress

If your methods of coping with stress aren't contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it's time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it's helpful to think of the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept.

Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

Dealing with Stressful Situations: The Four A's

Change the situation:

- Avoid the stressor
- Alter the stressor

Change your reaction:

- Adapt to the stressor
- Accept the stressor

Stress management strategy #1: Avoid unnecessary stress

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- **Learn how to say "no"** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you're close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress.
- **Avoid people who stress you out** – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can't turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.

- **Take control of your environment** – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic's got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.
- **Avoid hot-button topics** – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it's the topic of discussion.
- **Pare down your to-do list** – Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you've got too much on your plate, distinguish between the "shoulds" and the "musts." Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

Stress management strategy #2: Alter the situation

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn't present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

- **Express your feelings instead of bottling them up.** If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same.
- **Be willing to compromise.** When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- **Be more assertive.** Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk.
- **Manage your time better.** Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress you're under.

Stress management strategy #3: Adapt to the stressor

If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.

- **Reframe problems.** Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- **Look at the big picture.** Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- **Adjust your standards.** Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with "good enough."
- **Focus on the positive.** When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

Adjusting Your Attitude

How you think can have a profound effect on your emotional and physical well-being. Each time you think a negative thought about yourself, your body reacts as if it were in the throes of a tension-filled situation. If you see good things about yourself, you are more likely to feel good; the reverse is also true. Eliminate words such as "always," "never," "should," and "must." These are telltale marks of self-defeating thoughts.

Stress management strategy #4: Accept the things you can't change

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- **Don't try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control— particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- **Look for the upside.** As the saying goes, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- **Share your feelings.** Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
- **Learn to forgive.** Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

Stress management strategy #5: Make time for fun and relaxation

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.

Healthy ways to relax and recharge

- Go for a walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Call a good friend.
- Sweat out tension with a good workout.
- Write in your journal.
- Take a long bath.
- Light scented candles.
- Savor a warm cup of coffee or tea.
- Play with a pet.
- Work in your garden.
- Get a massage.
- Curl up with a good book.
- Listen to music.
- Watch a comedy.

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that you forget to take care of your needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury.

- **Set aside relaxation time.** Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't let your obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and charge your batteries.
- **Connect with others.** Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.
- **Do something you enjoy every day.** Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

Stress management strategy #6: Adopt a healthy lifestyle

You can increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health.

- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar.** The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.** Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get enough sleep.** Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

I. What Is Conflict?

Interpersonal conflict is a process that occurs when one person, group, or organizational subunit frustrates the goal attainment of another. In its classic form, conflict often involves antagonistic attitudes and behaviours such as name calling, sabotage, or even physical aggression.

II. Causes of Organizational Conflict

It is possible to isolate a number of factors that contribute to organizational conflict.

A. Group Identification and Intergroup Bias

This is the tendency of people to develop a more positive view of their own "in-group" and a less positive view of "out-groups" of which they are not a member.

This tendency appears to develop even when group membership is essentially arbitrary. The best prognosis is that people who identify with some groups will tend to be leery of out-group members.

(B) Interdependence

When individuals or subunits are mutually dependent on each other to accomplish their own goals, the potential for conflict exists. The potential for the abuse of power in such relationships and the on-going need for coordination are both potential problem areas.

C. Differences in Power, Status, and Culture Conflict can erupt when parties differ significantly in power, status, or culture.

Power. If dependence is not mutual, but one-way, an imbalance in power can arise and the potential for conflict increases.

Status. Status differences have the greatest potential for conflict when a reversal of expected roles occurs; that is, when a high status person like an executive, finds themselves being educated on computer usage by their administrative assistant. Some executives are defensive about this reversal of roles.

Culture. When two or more very different cultures develop in an organization, the clash in beliefs and values can result in overt conflict.

D. Ambiguity

Ambiguous goals, jurisdictions, or performance criteria can lead to conflict. Under such ambiguity, the formal and informal roles that govern interaction break down and it may be difficult to determine responsibility. Ambiguous performance criteria are a frequent cause of conflict between managers and employees.

E. Scarce Resources

Differences in power are magnified when common resources are in short supply. Resources may also act as buffers in sufficient quantities which, when removed, allow conflict to surface. Scarcity has a way of turning latent or disguised conflict into overt conflict.

III. Types of Conflict

Relationship conflict concerns interpersonal tensions among individuals that have to do with their relationship per se, not the task at hand. So-called "personality clashes" are examples of relationship conflicts. Task conflict concerns disagreements about the nature of the work to be done.

Differences of opinion about goals or technical matters are examples of task conflict. Process conflict involves disagreements about how work should be organized and accomplished. Disagreements about responsibility, authority, resource allocation, and who should do what all constitute process conflict. In the context of work groups and teams, task, relationship, and process conflict tend to be detrimental to member satisfaction and team performance.

IV. Conflict Dynamics

A number of events occur when one or more of the causes of conflict takes effect. As a conflict begins, "winning" becomes very important, the parties conceal information from each other, each group becomes more cohesive, contact with the opposite party is discouraged, negative stereotypes of the opposite party develop, and an aggressive leader skilled at engaging in conflict may emerge. Based on these internal dynamics, the elements of this process work against the achievement of a peaceful solution and the conflict continues to cycle "on its own steam."

V. Modes of Managing Conflict

Conflict expert Kenneth Thomas has developed a set of five conflict management styles or strategies that are a function of both how assertive you are in trying to satisfy your own or your group's concerns, and how cooperative you are in trying to satisfy those of the other party or group. Each style might have its place given the situation in which the conflict episode occurs.

A. Avoiding

Avoiding is a conflict management style characterized by low assertiveness of one's own interests and low cooperation with the other party. This is the "hiding the head in the sand" response to conflict. Its effectiveness is often limited.

B. Accommodating

Accommodating is a conflict management style in which one party cooperates with the other party, while not asserting one's own interests. This may be seen as a sign of weakness.

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C. Competing

Competing is a conflict management style that maximizes assertiveness for your own position and minimizes cooperative responses. The conflict tends to be framed in strict win-lose terms.

D. Compromise

Compromise is a conflict management style that combines intermediate levels of assertiveness and cooperation. This tends to be a satisficing approach — neither true competition nor true accommodation. Compromise does not always result in the most creative response to conflict.

E. Collaborating

Collaborating is a conflict management style that maximizes both assertiveness and cooperation. Collaboration works as a problem-solving approach where the object is to determine a win-win solution to the conflict that fully satisfies the interests of both parties. It is assumed that the solution to the conflict can leave both parties in a better condition. Effective collaboration frequently enhances productivity and achievement. Collaboration between organizational departments is particularly important for providing good customer service.

VIII. Is All Conflict Bad?

Traditionally, there has been an emphasis on the negative, dysfunctional aspects of conflict. Recently, though, there has been growing awareness of the potential benefits of organizational conflict. Some experts feel that conflict creates necessary organizational change which is necessary for adaptation and survival:

CONFLICT --> CHANGE --> ADAPTATION --> SURVIVAL

For organizations to survive, they must adapt to their environment. This requires changes in strategy that may be stimulated through conflict. This suggests that there are times when managers might use a strategy of conflict stimulation. **Conflict stimulation** is a strategy of increasing conflict in order to motivate change. This can occur when peaceful relationships take precedence over organizational goals or when differences are suppressed or downplayed. Scarcity and ambiguity can be manipulated by managers to stimulate conflict and change.

Conflict has a bad reputation.

Effects of Workplace Conflicts

If conflict occurs in the workplace it can have far-reaching and disruptive consequences. When relationships break down between colleagues, then individuals, whether they are management, team leaders or team members, may experience feelings of disorientation, distress and disconnection from colleagues. Often others not directly involved in the conflict will also be affected; the impact of this can be seen in:

- Poor workplace morale
- Decreased motivation within the organisation
- Health issues, such as stress and depression, affecting attendance and performance
- Poor performance and reduced output
- Increased staff turnover
- Problems in recruiting staff
- Damage to the reputation of the organisation

If a dispute culminates in a tribunal hearing, not only are there financial costs, in terms of legal fees and time spent preparing the case (for organisations, the majority of this is directors' and senior managers' time), individuals also have to deal with the stress of going through the process and their anxieties about the outcome.

Workplace mediators can help by working with the parties not only to address their issues, but also to explore the feelings behind the conflict. Mediators help parties to identify options for the future and work collaboratively on a practical and realistic joint agreement about the future.

Top 4 Causes of Conflict in the Workplace and How to Overcome It

Conflict has a bad reputation. Most often, conflict is associated with raised voices, heated debates, and high frustration. While these associations are sometimes accurate, it is important to consider the benefit of conflict: creativity. The famous adage, "two heads are better than one" is precisely about the advantages of conflict, for it assumes that two minds will have separate perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Diversity and communication are hallmarks of a great team, and the occasional root of clashes in the office. Conflict is a good thing; it's our response that makes conflict either a creative or destructive process. Here are a few common causes of conflict in the workplace, and some suggestions of how to navigate the occasional storm.

1. Personality Differences

The workplace brings together a wide array of personalities. In the myriad of different backgrounds, genders, cultures, political and religious beliefs, there are countless opportunities for ruffled feathers. The best cure is communication. Whether the issue involves an offense to core values or simply the irritation of pet peeves, it is important to establish boundaries immediately. Too often, people avoid difficult conversations in hopes that a problem will just go away, which of course it rarely does. By addressing an issue promptly, it improves the chances for a peaceful resolution and common understanding. But if it's put on the back burner, emotions may surface when anger levels are high, and increase the chances of an unproductive, high volume blowout.

2. Non-Compliance with Rules and Policies

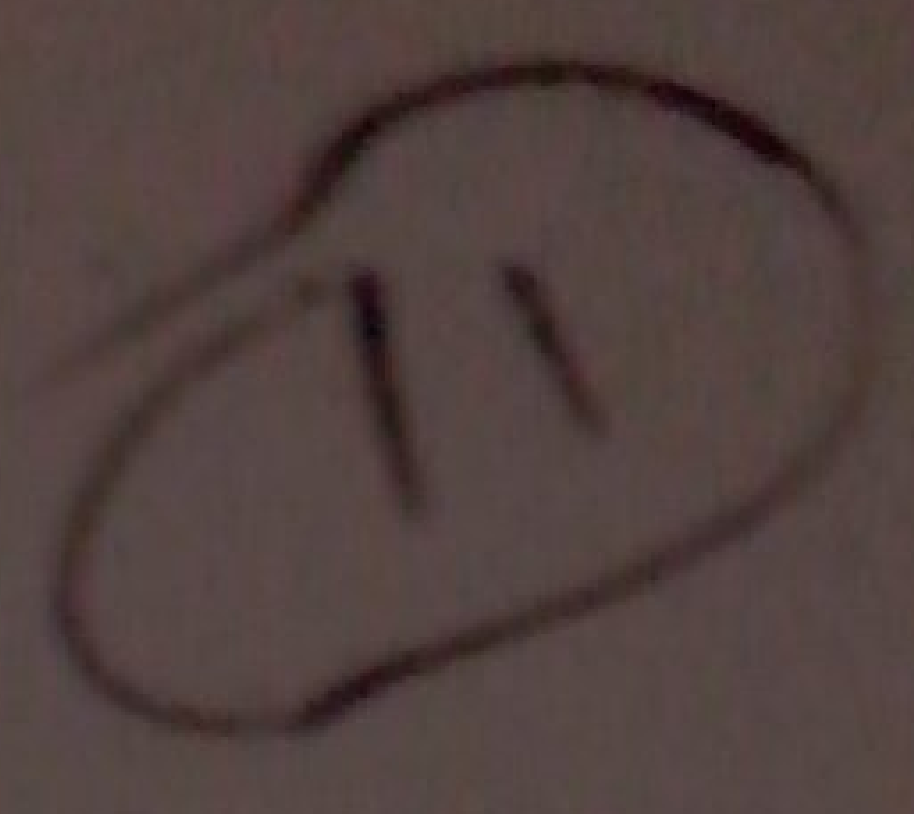
Whether you are pestered by another's disregard for company policy, or are rebelling against a rule yourself, non-compliance is a common gateway to office conflict. Rules are usually in place for a reason; so whichever side of a policy dispute you may find yourself, you should be clear about why a rule is in place, and what the consequences are for slip-ups. If agreement cannot be reached between differing parties or the rules themselves, it may be a good idea to look for a helpful mediator to resolve the issue. Just remember to keep the focus on the issue, not the person.

3. Misunderstandings

Botched communication is one of the top reasons for conflict in and out of the office. A great way to proactively decrease the potential for crossed wires is to employ effective listening techniques: give full attention, be genuinely interested, catch non-verbal messages, paraphrase, and collaborate. Keeping thorough records of communications can be a safety net when dealing with frequent mis-communicators.

4. Competition

Sometimes quotas and incentives can make it easy to forget the big picture. We stop seeing others as team members and start to see them as competitors. Healthy competition is a good motivator, but sometimes it inspires anti-productive behavior and unsavory results. The best defense in a highly competitive environment is managing your own emotions. Accept what



emotions arise and deal with them positively. Tired of always coming in second or third? Start focusing on competing with yourself rather than others. Remember that one person's success is good for the team on a whole.

Nij Reader