

Six Steps for Turning Your Stress into Success

It seems that there's a lot of it about! Stress that is. Individuals, businesses and organisations are working hard, sometimes struggling to survive. It's not surprising amid the chaos, constraints and hardship of these times. So when will it settle down, when will it get easier? Or perhaps it won't! Have you ever noticed how much change there is these days...how fast everything changes...and how the pace of change is getting even faster?

Maybe at times you enjoy the fast pace of change. And sometimes it can all become too much, leading to stress, anxiety, loss of sleep, even relationship problems. Perhaps also affecting your mental and physical health. If so, what can you do about it? How can you deal with all that pressure and stress and turn it into something more positive in your life?

The good news is that there are some practical and easy first steps you can take to change your own thinking and experience of stress. Here are some suggestions that you might like to consider, which many people have found help them to overcome the damaging effects of stress and turn it into real personal 'success'.

Step 1

Don't fight it...welcome it! Notice first that stress is actually a normal and natural human response to the day-to-day pressures of life. If we were to take steps to avoid all stress of any kind we would decline into a state of apathy. What matters is how we respond when we notice that we are experiencing stress. Stress is the important signal to tell us to change what we are doing. Your signal may just be tiredness, a particular emotional state, a familiar behaviour

pattern, inability to sleep, difficulty making decisions. It could be something else that feels 'bad' for you.

Welcome your stress signals – they are a product of your body's natural intelligence

Step 2

Beware of the myths! For example: 'I work better under pressure' – yes this is often true...but only to a point. As the pressure increases or is maintained beyond the point where we are working at optimum capacity our ability to be fully productive and think creatively declines. Usually without us realising when it's happening. There is always a limit. Knowing how to detect your own limit is the secret to being able to sustain your optimum performance.

Cultivate your ability to recognise when enough is enough and the pressure has gone beyond a level that motivates you.

Step 3

Stop buying into the 'weakness' thing! If people would have you believe that thinking and talking about your experience of stress is an admission of weakness...then think again. The most successful people know their limits, they know how and when to switch off and how to recover from the inevitable stress that builds up over time. And many people don't know this - they have ignored the signals and pushed themselves into ill health before realising it.

Act on your stress signals regardless of what others do. You are the expert on your own stress levels and you are responsible for your own wellbeing.

Step 4

Understand that your body and mind already know how to recover from stress.

We all have our own automatic, natural and unconscious process for 'bouncing back' and avoiding the harmful effects of too much stress. There is a regular cycle of stress build up and recovery – we go through a number of stages or states during this recovery process. The problem is we can get stuck somewhere in this cycle. Once you understand the cycle and recognise where you get stuck – it becomes a whole lot easier to get 'unstuck'!

Allow your mind and body to recover fully before tackling the 'next big thing'.

Step 5

Recognise the importance of physical activity!

When prolonged periods of stress begin to affect your health it is because of the reaction of your physical body to stress chemicals and hormones which have built up over time and are not being dissipated in the way that our body is 'designed' to function. Your physical reaction to undue stress is related to the 'fight or flight' response. We have evolved from cave dwelling ancestors who were highly physically active - and the body's way of recovering from the harmful effects of stress is to remove these chemicals through physical activity. The modern workplace and styles of travel often make it more difficult for us to achieve these benefits. Sometimes it takes a bit of creativity to find ways to fit more exercise into our already busy lives.

Walk off your stress. (Or run, or play football, or tennis.) Take a break and get moving!

Step 6

Identify and establish some boundaries for yourself!

Pressures in the work environment, and in domestic or family life, emanate from many different directions – from other people, management targets, personal goals and

objectives, challenging relationships and from our own desires to please ourselves or others. If you rely on your boss, your employer or even your partner to set appropriate limits for you then you're heading for problems. The only person who can truly look after you and your health is you! Think about the bigger picture of your life and identify what boundaries you need to put in place which will support your wellbeing and maintain your emotional and physical health. If **you** don't care for **yourself** properly, you certainly won't be able to sustain your ability to care for those other people that matter to you!

Plan your time so that you can balance your priorities and spend time on the important things.

Obviously, this is just a starting place. If you would like to go deeper and explore how you personally can apply these and other steps to become much more effective in managing your stress, or helping others to understand and manage their own stress – then you can!

You might consider attending a training programme which explain these 'conscious and unconscious processes' in more depth so that you can understand your own experience and discover those practical changes you can make which will turn your stress into greater success and a deeper sense of personal well-being.

Remember to slow down sometimes, breathe and live well!

Peter Jefford

Brilliant Minds
Suite 440, 99 Warwick Street
Leamington Spa, CV32 4RB
01926 435609
www.brilliantminds.co.uk