

Less Stress >> for Success

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Entrepreneurs can feel overwhelmed in dealing with the day-to-day demands of tracking business plans, meeting customer demands, generating revenue, paying bills, cutting costs, keeping employees engaged, hopeful and excited, and balancing family life.

In addition to these common external demands, there are also all of the internal demands you place on yourself. Even though the common demands of creating and maintaining a business and balancing family life are often difficult, they do not have to result in stress.

As an entrepreneur, you should recognize that preventing or alleviating stress in your life is as important as managing cash flow is to your business. While avoiding difficult situations altogether is impossible, preventing stress – whether on the job or at home – is important to maintaining good relationships, managing a business or career effectively, and enjoying good personal health.

Here are some fundamental understandings about stress and tips for preventing or alleviating it.

Stress is not some amorphous discomfort that’s hard to get your arms around. It’s

really a “catch-all” term for many of the toxic negatively toned emotions that we experience including dysfunctional anxiety, chronic irritability/anger, frustration and unjustified guilt.

Contrary to popular belief, stress can be prevented or alleviated – not just managed. The key to stress prevention is to know its causes and to realize that difficult situations and “stress” are not the same thing. That is, you can be in a very difficult situation and not experience stress. There are two root causes that must occur together for you to experience stress. First, you experience more *demands* than you have resources to meet comfortably and second your thoughts are focused on *anticipating a negative consequence*.

Keeping demands and resources in reasonable balance prevents stress from the get-go. When it is impossible to accomplish a balance and demands are taxing resources then what you choose to focus on – your view of the situation – is critical. If you focus on anticipating negative consequences then stress is guaranteed.

However, when demands are out of balance with resources and you choose to focus on something positive in your current situation or anticipating positive consequences – even if it is simply “I will learn from this experience!” then the psychological experience in the difficult situation is one of a positively toned “challenge” not stress.

Balance demands and resources. The first step in helping yourself prevent or alleviate stress is to recognize where your most troubling demands come from. Most often the more difficult demands originate

within ourselves, that is, we expect ourselves to do too much. We're unrealistic and hard on ourselves (guilt); we hold onto unrealistic expectations of other people (irritability/anger); we don't give ourselves enough time to adapt to a significant change in our life or to accomplish a goal we've set for ourselves (frustration); or we focus on the potential for negative things to happen (anxiety).

Balancing the factual demands and available resources is a lot easier when we can rid ourselves of the unreasonable demands that we place on ourselves or unachievable demands that we place on other people. Even without internally generated demands, factual demands can tax our resources creating a difficult situation. Keeping demands and resources in reasonable balance prevents stress.

Here are important strategies/tactics to use in managing demands and maximizing resources:

Organize your environment. Find a system of organization that works for you and use it! It's tough to function in chaos. Chaos contributes to feeling "out-of-control" and wastes time.

Break large goals down into smaller segments. Focusing on a large or complex goal that has not been broken down into more manageable segments often results in frustration. Ever try to lose 20 lbs? It's a lot easier to focus on losing one pound a week – and it's more gratifying to step on the scale.

Organize your tasks and time. Make "To Do" lists and use time management strategies doing the most complex tasks during your best functioning time of the day.

Plan ahead yet take things "a-day-at-a-time" or a "task-at-a-time." Being "present oriented" limits your cognitive

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focus on the now of what needs to be done, which maximizes your effectiveness on the task at hand.

Delegate what you can. Don't try to do everything yourself – delegate tasks to others.

Manage expectations. Set realistic expectations for yourself and others. Idealistic (unreachable) expectations of yourself – or "shoulds" – result in unjustified guilt. Unrealistic (not going to be met) expectations of others are the root of anger. Holding onto unlikely expectations results in chronic anger.

Accept situations that you cannot control. Repeatedly trying to change things and situations that you cannot control is a waste of energy and one of the root causes of situational depression. A better strategy is to accept those situations and work around them, develop contingency plans, and/or go with the flow.

Make it a priority to get restful sleep. Get 7-8 hours of sleep a night at least five nights a week.

Re-charge your batteries. Give yourself permission to spend some time doing things you enjoy – it's a basic human need. Doing something you enjoy and feeling like you're wasting time (guilt) is like trying to charge your car battery without both the (+) and (-) cables attached – it's a waste of time!

Attend to your spiritual self in whatever way works for you.

Maintain your social support system.

It's important to make time for family – put it on your "To-Do" list. Do an occasional lunch or dinner with friends

Eat healthy and be active (exercise).

Manage your thoughts. Managing your thoughts is the second critical component to preventing and alleviating stress. Positive thinking is NOT Pollyanna. See the glass half full rather than half empty and "not sweating the small stuff" is a stress prevention competency. Framing a difficult situation as a challenge and keeping your thoughts focused on what you might gain or benefit from it – even if it's focusing on what you might learn from a difficult situation – will serve you well in preventing stress.

The bottom line is that thoughts cause our stress emotions and managing our thoughts is central to preventing or alleviating stress even in the most difficult situations.

Fortunately, entrepreneurs commonly have a leg up in skillfully balancing demands and resources and managing thoughts because the personal attributes of entrepreneurs commonly include:

Optimism

Creativity

High energy/drive

Self-confidence

Decisiveness

High but realistic goals

Belief that you can control your destiny

Readiness to learn – defining failure as a learning opportunity

Persistence; and

The ability to get others to work with you.

Remember: Your major business asset is YOU!! Take care of yourself!



Brenda Lyon is a Professor in the Department of Adult Health Nursing at Indiana University School of Nursing. She is a nationally recognized expert in stress and fellow in the American Academy of Nursing and the National Academies of Practice. In addition to teaching in the MSN and PhD graduate programs at IU's School of Nursing she had a private practice focused on stress and stress-related physical illness for over 25 years and is in demand nation-wide for consultation and workshops on conquering stress. Lyon is an experienced entrepreneur who has assisted other entrepreneurs in health-related business endeavors including her work with Dr. Julie Meek in the use of Lyon's perceived health model and stress algorithms for the Haelan, Inc. "One Care Street" product. She is one of the owners of a family business, Aircorn Manufacturing, Inc. and Medivative Technologies, LLC where she spends 50 percent of her time contracted out from the University. Most recently she led IU School of Nursing's efforts in holding two national conferences for aspiring nurse entrepreneurs.