How Well Do You Cope with Stress?

By Norb Slowikowski

Although we often find ourselves under stress, it doesn’t mean that all stressful activity should be stopped. Once the areas of distress are located, we can begin to make choices that will move us in the direction of health.

Some general comments should be discussed before deciding on specific action. First, not all stress is bad. Without any stress we would be bored to death. In dealing with stress the goal is not its total removal, rather its creative management.

Second, there is an appropriate and healthy stress level that is unique for each person. A violin string that has no tension plays no music, and one that is too tight breaks. Each of the four violin strings plays proper music under different levels of tension. Each of us needs different varieties and amounts of stress to be most effective.

Third, we may thrive under some kind of stress while finding that other kinds are destructive. Some can skip sleep while others always need their eight hours. Some thrive on physical activity but can’t sit through a meeting filled with conflict. Some people need to take a walk during lunch while others can do well working straight through. Each person has a unique combination of stresses that are beneficial and stresses that are destructive. Find your combination and attend to it. If you need eight hours of sleep, then make sure you get it even if others don’t need it. If a situation is always destructively stressful for you, try to avoid it. The creative handling of stressors is an individual matter.

Fourth, the creative management of stress calls for an analysis of the whole person and the lifestyle. Every aspect of life can be either a source of painful distress or a source of re-energizing and positive stimulation. Every plan for the management of stress will be unique for each person.

Finally, and most important, when you’re under stress you must be ready to take action. No one or outside “cure” can ever effectively manage stress for someone else.

When you react to a stressful event, you need to consider the following:
- The control factor: Are you in control or is someone else?
- Is the stress worth dealing with? In other words, are you spending enormous amounts of time on a minor problem?
- Is the stress helping you achieve your goals?
- Is attempting to deal with the event more stressful than the event itself?
- Are the benefits greater than the energy you will expend?

People generally react to stress in two ways: fight (attack) or flight (retreat). Occasionally we react by standing fast, but this, in a sense, is the same as retreating. Ancient peoples reacted instinctively to threats or alarms by attacking or retreating. Animals still react in this manner. Current lifestyles prohibit us from reacting instinctively to the various threats we face each day. Instead we react in other ways, both physical and internal. More often than not, our fighting goes on internally, and often our flights or retreats are retreats in behavior only. In attitude, they are fights simply carried out internally.

You can cope with stress more effectively if you can identify the degree of excess stress you are experiencing. Though there is no one procedure for relieving a stressful situation, many well-known helpers such as diet, exercise or relaxation are suggested frequently. One of the best ways to manage stress is to understand it and how it affects people, and then apply this knowledge to your situation.

Work hard in life at something you’re good at and enjoy doing. The aim of life is self-expression, an aim usually difficult to achieve if you haven’t identified your strengths and how to use them.

About the Author
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