



WORKPLACE STRESS – a little something different

These days we can find innumerable, excellent, free, self- help, well-being resources online to help us manage stress, improve our well-being, build our resilience and practice mindfulness. The websites will mostly point to the same helpful interventions – which, often we will have tried already at least for one day like:

- Develop healthy lifestyle habits like – Eat and drink healthy, regular exercise, practice life work balance
- Practice Meditation and Mindfulness
- Talk it out
- Smile and Laugh more
- Practice Assertiveness

If you don't already do these regularly, the likelihood of you taking them up now may not be high. Still, I recommend trying them out for a bit longer next time as they really do work!

It takes time and effort to adjust your way of life and thinking. You will probably have some real time constraints or you are too stressed out to

develop a new lifestyle or create new habits - even though you know this is most likely what's needed!

The real challenge, the answer to which is not often found on these healthy lifestyle websites, but instead on motivation websites, is:

"How do I stick to these new habits when they don't feel like me? Deep down I am a bit lazy, crave mindlessness, am often grumpy and moody, my resting face is just naturally miserable looking, and as I want an easy life it's best to avoid assertiveness. And to top it all, of course I love coffee, sugar, bread and booze."

I believe we can all change, develop and grow, evolution is what we are all about right? The key challenge to managing stress is first to know that the answers lay in our hands.

Let's start from the beginning.

We feel stress when we feel we cannot cope or manage with a situation or a demand. Fear is the feeling behind stress. Think about this again, Stress is Fear. We *feel* fear, we *think* we cannot cope, our *bodies* react and we *behave* unhealthily. And it's not always in this order. Feelings, thoughts, our bodies and behaviour are all connected and affect each other. What is incredible is if we change just one of these i.e.

- feelings,
- thoughts
- the state of our bodies
- behaviour

then the others will be affected by that one change.

Pause. Let's do a brief meditation. This is changing the state of our body and stopping our thoughts.

Take a deep breath in through your nose while counting to five. Hold your breath for 3 seconds and now breathe out through your pursed lips to the count of 5. Congratulate yourself you have just meditated.

If we put our minds to it and face the fear, decrease the fear, turn the mountain into a molehill. If we think - 'I can manage this, I've done it before, this is a great challenge for me, I am growing here - we will turn what causes us pain, discomfort into something that makes us feel like we have achieved something.

Next take tiny baby steps

Tiny baby steps could entail:

- Once a week spend five minutes thinking about what stresses you
- Try meditation once a week. Meditation can consist of 3 deep breaths this would take less than 1 minute.
- Try avoiding sugar for one meal a day.
- Have one less cup of coffee a day than you normally do
- Walk one tube stop once a week
- Watch one comedy film or show once a fortnight
- Say No to your best friend once in a month.

The health gurus will have the underlying premise that a lot of stress is manageable by you. But the other thing we often want to do is pass the buck...uhh you say? Despite knowing differently, we still want the stress to be someone else's fault. It may be hard to admit this to a health guru, a counsellor, a coach, or even to yourself!

Stress at work is usually caused by:

- Long working hours and/or heavy workloads
- A feeling you are not quite capable
- Changes in the workplace
- Lack of contract stability

- Physical discomfort and/or unsuitable environment
- Having to deal with a range of demands at once
- Boredom
- Deadlines
- Work Culture clashing with your personality
- Not having enough power

and last and probably the biggest cause of stress at work for the majority of people is

- Tricky colleagues or boss

Your friends and colleagues may agree and sympathise that the person or persons in question are indeed very stressful and the usual advice is talk it out with that person or your boss, if indeed it isn't your boss we are talking about or avoid that person.

BUT

Usually you have difficulties with that person because that person is not open to talking about it, isn't smart enough to understand what you want to say, is too sensitive, is senior to you, you've already tried talking to them and it got nowhere! And if you can't avoid them because you work closely with them then what?

HOW about you try something that doesn't depend upon the other person changing. As you know there is only one person you can truly change – hard though it may be – and that is YOU. Try the following steps:

1. Change your perception of the person. Think he/she is NOT a pain in the neck. Think of this person as your 'Greatest Gift' (courtesy of the wonderful Whitney Houston) in your life. YES – I just wrote that – I know they feel far from a gift, never mind the greatest, but wait a minute. Seriously, if you can figure

out how to manage this person you will find other interpersonal difficulties at home and at work will also decrease.

2. Understand that people who we find difficult sometimes push buttons in us – often there are other people who don't find them as equally difficult as you.
3. Pay attention to how you feel physically when in the presence of your 'Greatest Gift'
4. So, identify your buttons by asking yourself what do they make you feel about yourself? Who else in your life has made you feel this way? Or are these characteristics in this person similar to yours but maybe you try to fight them or deny them? Know that pet hates in other people tell us more about our own personal battles than other people's actual characteristics.
5. Once you've identified your personal buttons work on them by breathing deeply 3X every time they are pushed. For example, you don't like to be told what to do as an adult because as a child you had a dictatorial, controlling Dad. Now every time someone tells you what to do especially if its someone you see as your equal, you feel quite tense. So, then you breathe 3X deeply in through your nose and count to 5 and then slowly out of your mouth and count to 5.
6. Then you look at the person and think they do not know you have this personal battle with being told what to do. They don't know that the ghost of your father is conjured up in your interactions. In fact, neither did you until you put some thought into it.
7. Finally, you fill yourself up with compassion and empathy for this rather difficult person and wonder if they ever get the control they seek or whether they are just struggling in life. You think of them as a child, you think of them as a fellow human being, you think of them and yourself in 100 years ☺
8. Occasionally, your greatest gift will be someone everyone finds difficult in which case they will have a characteristic that is commonly challenging and will either get moved around your organisation/company or get sacked. In this situation you simply have to find a way to manage this personality and if you can – you will have learnt something new.

9. You do not have to be the 'Greatest Gift's' best friend instead see them as your learning buddy at work. They never have to know this.
10. Asking yourself what is it about YOU that makes the interaction difficult with this person? What do you do that makes the interaction difficult?

*If you want to talk more about workplace stress, contact me for a chat.
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