



Stressed for Success?

by Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

In my book, *Untying the 'Nots' of Change Before We're Fit to be Tied*, we looked at the incredible monetary risks to an organization due to absenteeism which is often related to the increased stress levels that employees experience. More shocking than that is the fact that research on the relationship between health and emotion indicates that stress affects the body at the cellular level in ways that increase the risk of disease. Stress is linked to heart disease and hypertension, and may even play a role in cancer.

We must commit ourselves to a plan of action that will help fight off the ugly symptoms of stress. In this article we will look at two components of your Stress Management Game Plan: fitness and focus.

The changes have created a lot of opportunities for people who want to change. It is hard even when you think the changes are for the best. It is hard when you are unsure if the changes will last for very long. It is exciting, invigorating, and draining all at the same time.

Director of Data Service

Fitness

Regular exercise can really make a difference as a stress reducer. Neuroscience researchers at Rockefeller University found that regular, moderate exercise is probably the best way to counteract the effects of stress. Physical activity can reduce the insulin levels that are naturally raised by stress and exercise also lowers blood pressure and the heart's resting rate.

Most experts suggest a minimum of 20-minutes of cardiovascular exercise three times per week and strength building (i.e. weight lifting) twice weekly. Consider how many of us own a piece of exercise equipment and have good intentions but don't follow through and use it. Let's dust off that exercise equipment and start doing something that will have positive short and long-term effects on our health and well-being.

If you are unsure of how to build your strength, I'd strongly recommend the book, *Strong Women Stay Young* by Miriam E. Nelson, Ph.D., as an excellent, research-based resource. Dr. Nelson shows how after a year of twice weekly strength training, women's bodies were 15 to 20 years more youthful. A fascinating and enlightening book that is not just for women!

Aside from the physical well-being benefits, people also report that exercise can help you think more creatively. Exercise gives you more energy. The problem is that we never get beyond the pain of exercise to the point where we reap the energy benefits. The benefits of exercise do not happen overnight.

For many years I didn't exercise because I didn't have a weight problem or any specific health concerns. I still don't have a weight problem, but now I exercise simply because it's right for me. I feel better and have more energy. It feels good to know I'm doing something now that will reap many benefits as I age.

Exercise is a lot like saving money -- it's painful initially (we'd rather spend than save) and it doesn't seem like it makes much of a difference. Yet, we all know with compound interest that a little money saved now can reap huge dividends down the road. Exercise for the stress reliever that it is and know that it is an investment in your future health.

Focus – Meditation

Herbert Benson has demonstrated in his research that while chronic stress is harmful to the body, daily meditation can reduce stress and promote relaxation and overall well-being. Even Karl Jung went so far as to say that spirituality was such an essential ingredient in psychological health that he could heal only those middle-age people who embraced a spiritual or religious perspective toward life.

“Nourishing the soul” means making sure I attend to those things that give my life richness and depth of meaning.

Robert Fulghum, author

Meditation is a way of quieting your mind and increasing your ability to *focus* and concentrate. This is done by blocking out distractions and focusing your attention on one thing at a time. This process not only calms your mind, but also calms your body. The result is a more tranquil mental and physical state of well being. Meditation can counteract the effects of stress on your body.

Meditation elicits a specific set of physiologic changes -- decreased metabolism and heart rate, easier breathing and distinctively slower brain waves. Recent research demonstrates that stress hormones have a direct impact on the body's immunological defenses against disease. “Anything involved with meditation and controlling the state of mind that alters hormone activity has the potential to have an impact on the immune systems,” states David Felton, chairman of the Department of Neurobiology at the University of Rochester.

Consider meditating during the first fifteen minutes you are awake to set the tone for your day. My typical morning routine includes reading my Bible, praying, exercising, and then showering and readying myself for the day. I have found that my faith in God has been

my only rock and fortress throughout all the changes that have occurred in my life. When all feels unstable around me, I have confidence that God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. On what is your confidence built?

Dr. Herbert Benson found that praying affects epinephrine and other corticosteroid messengers or stress hormones, leading to lower blood pressure, more relaxed heart rate and respiration and other benefits.

Claudia Wallis, *Time* magazine

Perhaps your meditation time will include yoga or deep breathing techniques. Maybe a good start for your day is to read an inspirational book in the morning or to write in your journal. Choose a routine that fits your beliefs and comfort level and begin reaping the mental, emotional, and physical benefits of meditation.

*Excerpted from the book, **Untying the 'Nots' of Change Before You're Fit to be Tied.** Patti Hathaway, CSP, **The CHANGE AGENT**, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: www.thechangeagent.com for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog*