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Stressed for Success?

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 newsletter issue we will look at two additional components of your Game Plan: fitness and focus.

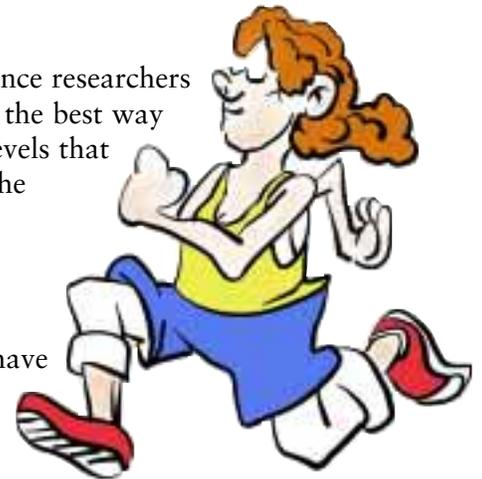
The changes have created a lot of opportunities for people who want to change. It is hard even when you think the changes are for the best. It is hard when you are unsure if the changes will last for very long. It is exciting, invigorating, and draining all at the same time.

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 which 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 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.

Next issue will discuss some final stress management tips. For more details on managing your stress, read Patti's book, *Untying the 'Nots' of Change Before You're Fit to be Tied*.

Customer Service Survey Results:

In my last "Tips Newsletter" I asked readers to complete a survey on "What's your biggest customer service challenge?" Following are the results:

- 31% I don't have cooperation from other internal departments
- 28% I'm uncomfortable handling angry/dissatisfied customers
- 20% I'm overwhelmed and don't have enough time to serve my customers
- 15% I don't have the proper tools to serve my customers
- 3% My organization offer poor products/services
- 3% I have a negative attitude



It was fascinating to see that the biggest challenge is the lack of cooperation from others in your organization. When I develop customized training programs on Customer Loyalty for my clients - this lack of internal teamwork comes up consistently and is something I always address in my programs. Thanks to each of you who participated in my survey! I'd love to continue this "dialogue" and hear your best idea or story for how to overcome this internal cooperation problem. I'll do a future article on this topic and will send a "107 Tips for Developing Customer Loyalty" tips booklet to anyone who's ideas I use (as well as give you credit). Please e-mail me your best idea to Patti@thechangeagent.com.



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