Stress Prevention in 6 Steps

STEP 2 AVOID UNNECESSARY STRESS: PROBLEM SOLVING

“The most important way to manage stress is to prevent it from ever occurring,” Dr. Robert Epstein, Psychologist and Author
The Six Steps

1. **Assess**: Raising Awareness
2. **Avoid**: Unnecessary stress; problem solving
3. **Appraise**: Cognitive Restructuring
4. **Accept**: Mindfulness
5. **Activate**: Building resilience
6. **Attune**: Social Support: using emotional intelligence skills
Step 1: Aware

- The importance of managing stress
- Stress Symptoms
- Stress Related Dis-ease
- Counter-productive Coping
- 70-90% of doctor’s visits are for stress
- Pills only mask the symptoms of stress
- This is why we put our stress last.
- We need to put it first on our list of priorities instead of last.
Overview

- What is unnecessary stress?
- Why problem solving is under rated.
- Why problem solving is difficult when you’re stressed
- Keeping a Journal
- Planning
- Organizing
- Time management
- Values
- Problem-solving
Why this approach is under rated?

- Mostly we talk about stress we talk about MANAGING IT, here we are talking about *eliminating* it.
- That’s why problem solving is cutting edge
- Mort Orman: The 14 Day Stress Cure
- Stress is a word that stands for problems
- What does it mean when you say “My job is stressful.”
Looking for underlying causes of stress

- Obvious causes of stress: Traffic jam, dawdling child, a printer that is jammed.
- Sometimes the true causes of stress are not so obvious:
  - Time Pressure
  - Job stress
  - Relationship problems
  - Financial stress
What is unnecessary stress?

Some stress is unavoidable. This is the stress we have to face:
- A major illness
- A bad economy
- Bad weather

Any PREDICTABLE problem that you can solve:
- Waiting in line at the bank
- Getting stuck in rush hour traffic
- The cell phone that keeps dying on you
How do we figure out what stress in our life is unnecessary? Keeping a journal or a log...

- Most of us only have a vague notion of what bothers us.
- Benefits of Journaling
  - Process emotions
  - See that emotions are fleeting
  - Get perspective on your life
- Difference between a journal and a log
# Tracking Stress using a simple log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>8AM</td>
<td>Stuck in traffic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>10AM</td>
<td>Late for work</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>10AM</td>
<td>Explain lateness to boss</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>Noon</td>
<td>No time for lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>3PM</td>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>6PM</td>
<td>Need to work late</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>8PM</td>
<td>Miss dinner w/ family</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Keeping a journal or a log

- You will see patterns emerge
  - Certain people
  - Times of day
  - Activities
  - Certain places you go
- Finding a pattern is great!
  - Solve a lot of stress with one change
Keeping a Journal or a log

• What emerged for me when I kept a Journal:
  ○ I experienced stress at the grocery store, the bank and the DMV.
    ▪ Can you guess what I was doing in all three places?

• Now I actually had a problem that I could solve!
Why problem-solving is difficult when you’re stressed

- Brain evolved over hundreds of thousands of years
- Triune brain
  - Reptilian
  - Mammalian
  - Primate
- Stress results when these three areas of the brain don’t function well together
- Your emotional brain takes over your thinking brain
- This what author Dan Goleman calls an amygdala hijacking
The control center of the brain

- The prefrontal cortex: center for imagination, awareness, abstract thinking
- Mindfulness meditation increases the size of the prefrontal cortex
- Prefrontal cortex CAN over ride the emotional brain and does so all the time. This is what mindfulness training is all about.
Five ways to eliminate a lot of stress

- All things we do in the PRE FRONTAL CORTEX to PREVENT STRESS
  - Planning
  - Organization
  - Time management
  - Make list of values
  - Problem-solve
Planning: What happens when we don’t plan?

- **Forget to mail the mortgage check:**
  - Your credit rating goes down

- **Forget your car serviced**
  - Breakdown by the side of the road

- **Forget to back up your hard drive**
  - Lose valuable data and crucial files

- **Forget to make a shopping list**
  - Have to make two trips to the store
What happens when we do plan

- Taking 5-10 minutes to plan out your day
- Prioritize the plan
- Make a list of the six most important things you have to do each day
- Weekly, monthly, yearly and 5 year plan

- Time Magazine/Dr. Robert Epstein Survey of 3000: The stress management technique that worked best, according to the survey: planning. In other words, “fighting stress before it even starts, planning things rather than letting them happen,” says Epstein. “That means planning your day, your year and your life so that stress is minimized.”
What happens when we get disorganized: Why mess causes stress

- **Bombards our minds** with excessive stimuli.
- **Distracts us** by drawing our attention away from what our focus should be on.
- **Makes it more difficult to relax**, both physically and mentally.
- **Constantly signals to our brains** that our work is never done.
- **Creates feelings of guilt** ("I should be more organized") and embarrassment especially when others unexpectedly drop by our homes or work spaces.
- **Inhibits creativity and productivity** by invading the open spaces that allow most people to think, brainstorm, and problem solve.
- **Frustrates us** by preventing us from locating what we need quickly.

- Psychology Today
So how can we get more organized

- Check your journal for signs of disorganizational stress like always looking for things and address this first.
- Work from a clean desk
- Keep a pending file
- Clean up your desk or work area at the end of each day. ALLOW TIME TO DO THIS.
- Celebrate organization day one day a month.
What happens when we don’t practice time management

- Too much to do, not enough time to do it.
- Never any time for ourselves
- Never any time for our loved ones.
- Never any time to practice stress management
- Rushing around all day, putting out fires
- Always in crisis mode

So how do we get out of this mode?
Time Management Matrix

Q1: Urgent AND important
- Crises
- Deadline driven projects
- Medical emergencies
- Putting out fires
- Last minute preparations

Q2: Important but NOT urgent
- Education (reading)
- Stress management
- Relationship building
- Exercise
- Planning

Q3: Urgent but NOT important
- Many interruptions
- Some phone calls
- Most texting
- Some meetings
- Watching the news

Q4: NOT urgent & NOT important
- Surfing the internet
- Opening junk emails
- Most TV watching
- Video games
- Computer games

Must do
Should do
Avoid doing
Don’t do
What happens when we don’t consider our most important values

- We feel this low level of stress and we have no idea why.
- We feel like we’re caught on a treadmill.
- We feel empty.
- We feel burned out.
- We have no sense of purpose.

Victor Stretcher
What are your top 5 values

- What do people value?
  - Religious beliefs
  - Health
  - Peace
  - Freedom
  - God
  - Happiness
  - Beauty
  - Love
  - Learning
  - Status
  - Intelligence

- Priority matters:
- (Shadow values) If someone followed you around for 1 week what would THEY think your highest value would be?
- How would your life be different if you put peace of mind (stress management) as your highest value?
My personal definition of stress:

A problem you BELIEVE you can’t solve.
Shift your focus Forward

- Stress usually hits us by surprise
- Give yourself time to adjust to having a problem
- Become solution oriented instead of problem oriented
- Shift your focus forward: How can I solve this problem
Make a list of your top ten sources of stress

1. Relationship difficulties
2. Long commute
3. Car keeps breaking down
4. Always running late
5. Kids don’t clean their rooms
6. Too many meetings
7. Need to lose weight
8. Need to live on a budget
9. Can’t say no
10. Too much clutter
Problem solve

- Solve one problem at a time
  - Brainstorm
  - Ask others
  - Find a mentor

- Don’t think about it
  - Put it off until you have to decide
  - Walk away from problem
  - Think about something else
  - Sleep on it.

- Write one problem down at the top of a blank sheet of paper
7 Ways to AVOID unnecessary stress

First Keep a log of your stress for two weeks then:

1. **Plan.** Spend ten minutes a day planning
2. **Organize.** Celebrate organization day at least once a month
3. **Manage time.** Use the time management matrix and take time from quadrant 4 and apply it to quadrant 2
4. **Make a list of your top 5 values.**
5. **Shift your focus forward.**
6. **Write down your top ten sources of stress.**
7. **Problem-solve** each problem, one at a time.
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