

10 Proven Techniques to Reduce Stress

By Dave Luehr | 23 November 2020

Stress. We all have it. We all wish we didn't. But that isn't the end of the story. It's how we handle our stress that tells the true tale.

The effects of stress are 'contagious' and the negative energy grows exponentially within an organization. As the leader, not only is your stress level typically higher, but your team takes their cue from you. If you're stressed, snapping and harried, they will unconsciously pick up on the tension...and the stress monster has a feast. By using the techniques below, you can tame the beast whenever it rears its ugly head!

But How, You Ask?

The people who deal with stress most effectively are proactive in preventing stress and use those same practices to help them handle unexpected stress. And I know it's not as easy as that sentence makes it sound! Applying the actions that prevent and address the invasion takes work and focus.

You can start by stopping. Stop and take a few deep breaths. Stop the instinctive emotional reaction and take 20 minutes to process the situation and the options. Stop and look at the SOP's below and choose which will have the most impact, then apply them. Continue to apply them daily and soon you will have built new habits that will allow for a much more manageable and happy life.

1. Communicate clearly and consistently! Don't assume that your team knows what you are thinking. During morning meetings, be clear with instructions and expectations – motivate and lead so that you're not constantly answering questions or putting out fires.
2. Clean your desk off. It sounds so simple, but clear physical space clears mental space. This is not an arm swipe of everything to the floor! Use the time putting things away to let your mind calm as the space clears.
3. Do a brain dump. Get everything out of your head and down on paper. When we put our thoughts on paper, it removes the emotion from the equation. Often, those swirling thoughts and overwhelming feelings become manageable in black and white.
4. Delegate or eliminate to prevent overload. Ask yourself, "Is this task truly my responsibility? Is it essential or does it deceptively feel urgent?" Delegate what you can to your team members and say no (appropriately) and eliminate what is unnecessary.
5. Take your to do list and prioritize everything. Divide the tasks into four categories: 1. Urgent and important, 2. Not urgent but important, 3. Urgent but not important, 4. Not urgent or important. Work diligently on the top two categories and then eliminate or delegate the rest!
6. Start on something – action eliminates stress! Take one of those urgent and important tasks and knock it out. The feeling of accomplishment with each task accomplished builds momentum for the next item.
7. Take a big project and break it into bite-size pieces. Then take the bites and timeline them out on your daily to do lists. Once they're lined out, you not only don't have to hold it all in your head anymore (creating more stress), but you also have the assurance that the project can and will be completed on time!

8. Block time on your calendar to work on tasks. This is extremely important for those “important but not urgent” tasks so you can deal with them before they become urgent. Turn off all distractions and knock them out. This includes phones, texts, social media – you can even pull the blinds down on the windows if needed. Let your team know that for this block of time, you are unavailable except for emergencies.
9. Take time for some fun with your team! Throw a beach ball around or another brief activity that gets the heart pumping and a smile on everyone’s face. Get that positive energy flowing! When they are less stressed, your stress is also reduced.
10. Regularly re-train your team in the systems and processes (the “Playbook” of your business) so that they are not relying on you to remind them or constantly coming to you with questions. This repetition also reduces the incidences of mistakes – and we all know that mistakes in a body shop equal stress!

The Oxygen Mask Bonus

You know the airplane safety instructions that we all ignore while waiting for take-off? Well, there is a key stress tip hidden in there: if you don’t put your oxygen mask on first, how can you effectively lead and help others in your organization?

1. Practice essential self-care. Don’t skip meals; take a few minutes for deep breathing (particularly when you feel overwhelmed); step outside for 10 minutes to get some fresh air. These tips may sound simple, but they have a profound impact on your nervous system and stress levels!
2. Proactively anticipate problems. Ask yourself each morning, is there a situation that could go wrong today and how would the best version of me deal with this? Reacting to a crisis is more stressful than anticipating and choosing the best course of action ahead of time. Don’t dwell on problems all day; just be prepared in case they come up.
3. Take one small, bold step each day toward your vision of success. The positive, emotional reward of knowing you are that much closer to your ‘big goal’ is immeasurable.

Conclusion

We all have stress – no matter how much we wish for the magic cure! The good news is that we all have choices in handling it. Let’s be proactive and prepared for effective, healthy stress management!