RETHINKING STRESS:
Transforming the Stress of Daily Hassles, Adversity, and Job Burnout into Health and High Performance

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Stressed?

Daily Hassles
Demands
Deadlines
Disappointments
Conflicts
Irritations

Social psychology researchers estimate:

30 stress events per day

Stress-response habits predict:
Mood, health, relationships, productivity
What is your current relationship with stress?

Identify one of the more stressful things you are facing. In what ways have you responded to it?
“I’m an old man now, and I have known a great many problems in my life…

…most of which never happened.”

— Mark Twain
What is Stress?

**Stressors** – anything that may knock us out of balance

**Stress-responses** – what our body and mind does to try to establish balance

**Stress levels** – daily hassles to life-altering tragedy
Physiology
Effects of Chronic Stress

- Increased pain, inflammation
- Immune system compromise
- Insomnia
- Slowed tissue, cell recovery
- Cardiovascular disease
- Metabolic syndrome
- Chronic fatigue
- Anxiety, depression
- Stress-related disease

60-80% of doctor visits have stress component!
There are 2 Basic Responses to Stress…

1. Those who avoid stress and stay stuck!

2. Those who learn to embrace stress… learn from it… and use it as fuel to thrive during hard times.

How do I tend to avoid stress?

Everyone can build resilience!
Everyone Faces Adversity...

Change

Trauma

Loss

Pain

Our **mindset** toward adversity is the critical factor to resilience and thriving
What about Good Stress?

Bungee jumping stimulates the fight-or-flight stress response, along with feel good chemicals!
“It's not what happens to you that matters ... but what you do with it” —Dr. Hans Selye
Stress Inoculation Research

Hardiness = “The courage to grow from stress”

Salvador Maddi  Bell Telephone de-regulation – 1980’s

What doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger
Stress Redefined...

“Stress is what arises when something we care about is at stake”

-Kelly McGonigal, PhD

Think about a recent stress. What did you care about that was at stake?
Scientific Shift: Is There a Positive Side to Stress?

Can stress be helpful? Welcoming stress can boost health, performance, and more!
Yes, stress can be toxic…

But, stress can also:

**Be Fuel!**

- Motivation
- Energy
- Improve performance
- Learn from adversity
- Keep me connected
- Help avoid danger
- Protect self or others
- Focus on goals
- Live a meaningful life
Stress Response Mindsets: Alternatives to Fight/Flight/Freeze

Fight/Flight = Threat

Or, use stress as signal to:
1. Rise to challenge
2. Connect
3. Learn/Grow
How the Stress Response Helps Rise to the Challenge:  

1. Focuses your attention 
2. Heightens your senses 
3. Increases motivation 
4. Mobilizes energy 

McGonigal (2015)

Think about a time you have turned stress into a challenge....
Protect & Connect
Stress Response

Think about times your stress has moved you to connect....
Stress Recovery: Stuck or Learning Resilience?

- Going through stress can make you better at it!
  - Mindset shift: expecting to learn from stressful experiences alters physical stress response
  - Inoculating for future stress = resilience
How Stress Mindset Shift Helps Learning and Growing

- Neuro-steroids activated
- Integrates the experience
- Enhances performance and productivity
- Improves health outcomes – reduces depression, anxiety, illness
- Recovers negative effects of stress hormones on brain and heart

How could your stress help you learn, grow, and live meaningfully?
What is My Stress Language Under Pressure?

“I’m overwhelmed”

“It’s too much”

“I can’t stand it”

“It will get better”

“I’ve been through this before”

“I’ll find a way
What is My Negative Stress Language Under Pressure?

Think about examples of statements that go through your mind when you’re stressed.

Examples:

“This is too much”;

“I’m stressed out”;

“Why do I always do this?”;

“I’m overwhelmed”;

“I’m such a #@%!).

What thoughts or expressions are your stress language?
Performing Under Pressure Mindset
Just Calm Down??... or “I can do this”

“Stress as Enhancing” mindset studies:

1. Social stress test
   - Improved performance
   - Even those with social anxiety disorder!

2. Job burnout
   - Mid-career teachers, doctors
   - Attitude toward stress on job – protects from burnout
Daily Mindset Shift: Change the Channel!!

- Know you have the capacity to change the current mindset channel
- Choose to face today’s problems as challenges
- Use stress as fuel to act
Re-Think Stress

3 Steps to a ‘Stress-is-Enhancing’ Mindset:

Step 1: • Acknowledge Stress

Step 2: • Welcome Stress

Step 3: • Utilize Stress
Helping Others Protects Against New Stress-Related Disease

Volunteering “vaccinates” for stress-related disease

Non-Volunteers:
Major stressful life events increase rate of new serious health diagnoses

Volunteers:
Stressful life events had no effect on new stress-related health diagnoses

U Buffalo 2013 3-year Study, 1000 adults
Conclusion
Stress: “If it doesn’t kill me…”

Stress is harmful….except when it’s not?! Stress is debilitating
…except when you use it as fuel, energy and motivation to resolve problems
Conclusion

Stress: “If it doesn’t kill me…”

Stress is harmful…except when it’s not?!

Performance stress can impair performance
...except when you become excited and use the energy to reach your goal
Conclusion
Stress: “If it doesn’t kill me…”

Stress is harmful….except when it’s not?!

Stress increases the risk of health problems
...except when you use it to reach out, rise to the occasion, or solve problems
Conclusion
Stress: “If it doesn’t kill me…”

Stress is harmful….except when it’s not?!

Daily hassles can lead to stress-related disease
…except if you accept hassles as part of life
Conclusion
Stress: “If it doesn’t kill me…”

Stress is harmful….except when it’s not?!

Anxiety leads to panic
...except when you believe you are up for the challenge
For Further Reading

1. The Upside of Stress: Why Stress is Good for You and How to Get Good at It by Kelly McGonigal, Avery, NY, 2015.
4. Stop Stress This Minute by James Porter, WELCOA, Omaha, NE, 2012.
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