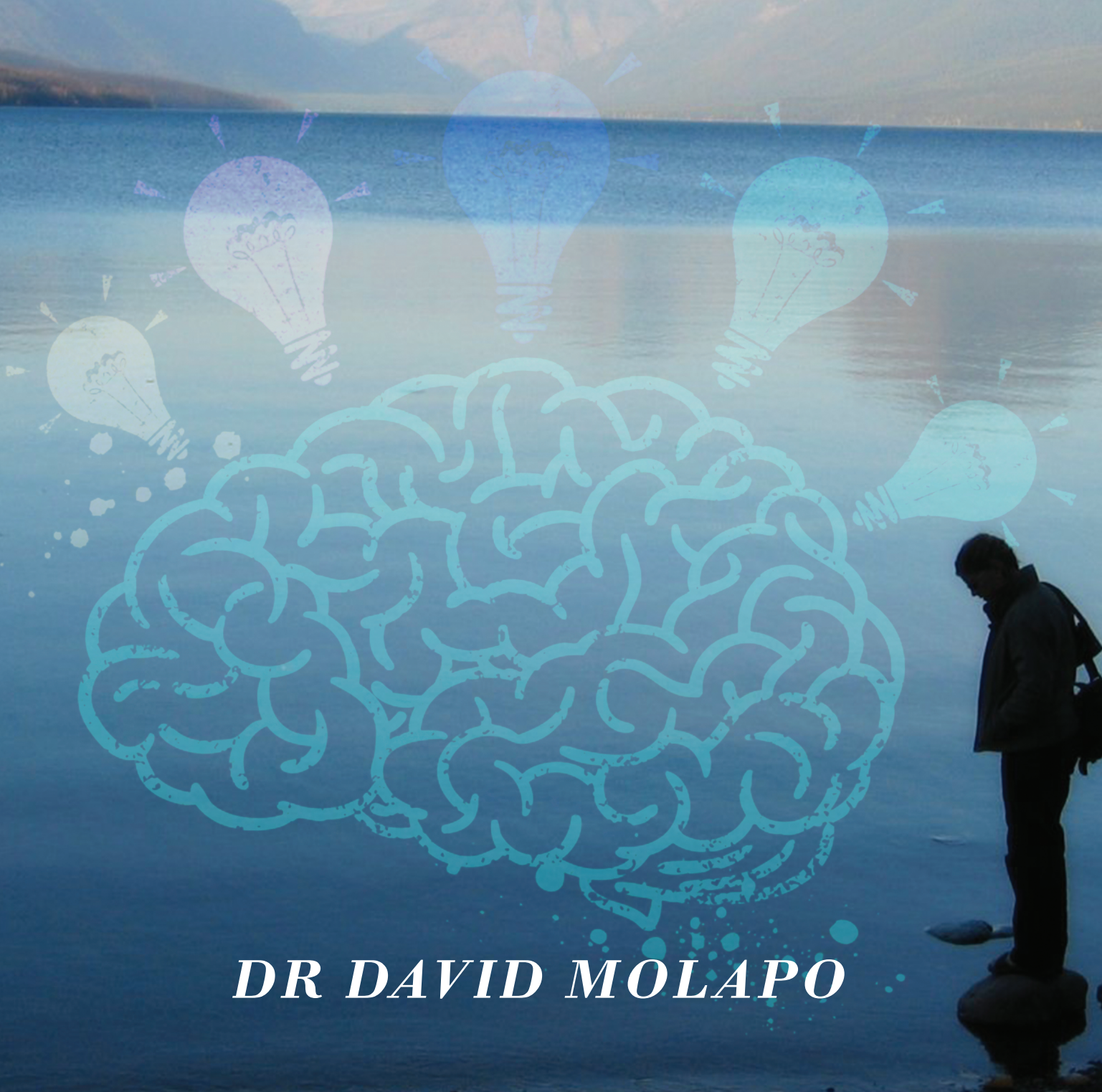


Stress **MANAGEMENT**



DR DAVID MOLAPO

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	5
Chapter One: Understanding Stress	6
<i>What is Stress?</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>What is Eustress?.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Understanding the Triple “A” Approach.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Practical Illustration.....</i>	<i>8</i>
Chapter Two: Creating a Stress-Reducing Lifestyle	9
<i>Eating Properly</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Exercising Regularly.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Sleeping Well</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Practical Illustration.....</i>	<i>13</i>
Chapter Three: Altering the Situation.....	14
<i>The First A</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Identifying Appropriate Situations.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Creating Effective Actions.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Practical Illustration.....</i>	<i>17</i>

Chapter Four: Avoiding the Situation	18
<i>The Second A.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Identifying Appropriate Situations.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Creating Effective Actions.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Practical Illustration.....</i>	<i>21</i>
Chapter Five: Accepting the Situation	22
<i>The Third A.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Identifying Appropriate Situations.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Creating Effective Actions.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Practical Illustration.....</i>	<i>25</i>
Chapter Six: Using Routines to Reduce Stress.....	26
<i>Planning Meals</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Organizing Chores.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Using a To-Do List</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Practical Illustration.....</i>	<i>30</i>
Chapter Seven: Environmental Relaxation Techniques	31
<i>Finding a Sanctuary</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Using Music</i>	<i>32</i>

<i>Seeing the Humor</i>	33
<i>Practical Illustration</i>	34
Chapter Eight Physical Relaxation Techniques	35
<i>Soothing Stretches</i>	35
<i>Deep Breathing</i>	38
<i>Tensing and Relaxing</i>	39
<i>Meditation</i>	40
<i>Practical Illustration</i>	41
Chapter Nine: Coping with Major Events	42
<i>Establishing a Support System</i>	42
<i>Creating a Plan</i>	42
<i>Knowing When to Seek Help</i>	44
<i>Practical Illustration</i>	46
Chapter Ten: Our Challenge to You	47
<i>Creating a Stress Log</i>	47
<i>Week One: Recording Events</i>	49
<i>Week Two: Identifying Stressors and Creating a Plan</i>	49
<i>Week Three: Creating New Habits</i>	50

<i>Reviewing and Evaluating</i>	51
<i>Practical Illustration</i>	53
Conclusion	54
<i>Words from the Wise</i>	54

Preface

Welcome to the Stress Management. Positive and negative stress is a constant influence on all of our lives. The trick is to maximize the positive stress and to minimize the negative stress. This book will give you a three-option method for addressing any stressful situation, as well as a toolbox of personal skills, including using routines, relaxation techniques, and a stress log system.

Chapter One: Understanding Stress

To begin, let's look at what stress is. We'll also explore how stress can be positive and negative, and we'll look at the Triple A approach that will form the basis of this book.

What is Stress?

The Random House Dictionary defines stress as, "physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension," and, "a situation, occurrence, or factor causing this." The word "stress" actually comes from a Latin word meaning, "distress."

Stress can be difficult to pin down because it is a very individual thing. For me, public speaking is very stressful – but it may be one of your great joys in life. Remember this during this workshop: since stress is different for everyone, your approach must be personalized, too. Typically, we interpret stress as a negative thing, but it doesn't have to be that way.

What is Eustress?

"Eustress" means stress with a positive effect. It was coined by psychologist Richard Lazarus in 1974. How can stress be positive, you ask? Think of the emotional strain caused by these positive events:

- Winning a race
- Being a new parent
- Riding a rollercoaster
- Watching a scary movie

In these situations, the physical, mental, or emotional strain actually produces positive emotions, rather than the negative emotions usually associated with stress. Without distress or eustress, life would be a pretty boring ride!

Understanding the Triple “A” Approach

In this workshop, we will give you three main ways to approach stress. It is important to remember that you have a choice! You can choose to:

- **Alter** the situation or your approach to it.
- **Avoid** the situation.
- **Accept** the situation.

Before we explore this approach, however, let’s look at the foundation of a low-stress lifestyle.

Practical Illustration

Jim was up to his ears with work. Lily, Jim's coworker, found him hiding in the break room feeling down in the dumps about his work load. Lily lent him her ear. Jim explained how anxious he was because he was drowning in work. Lily helped him understand that avoiding the stress wasn't going to solve his dilemma. In fact, avoiding it would make his work load even heavier. Lily offered suggestions to help him get out from under his stress in a more positive light. Lily showed Jim that if he tackled his to do list one item at a time that he could chip away at his work load and the burden wouldn't feel so heavy. Lily showed Jim how to prioritize his tasks and he began to make a dent in his work load and could feel the stress falling off of his shoulders.

Chapter Two: Creating a Stress-Reducing Lifestyle

To begin, let's explore the foundation of a positive, low-stress lifestyle. This foundation is made up of three building blocks: diet, sleep, and exercise. No stress reduction program will be successful in the long term unless you have this solid foundation.

Eating Properly

For many people, meals have become an afterthought, made up of fast food, and frozen items in boxes. Most adults know what they should eat – they just don't eat it. Recently the Centers for Disease Control in the United States estimated that less than a quarter of adults get their recommended serving of fruits and vegetables each day.

Sticking to a healthy diet is a key part of managing stress. Giving your body the proper fuel will give you the energy you need to battle the harmful effects of stress. Remember, garbage in, garbage out!

Any changes in diet, sleep, and exercise must be lifestyle-oriented. There are no quick fixes. With this in mind, set small goals for yourself. Perhaps this week your goal will be to eat a piece of fruit every day. Or, perhaps you'll swap out that lunchtime burger for a salad.

Remember that progress is very individual. Don't expect yourself to start eating like an Olympic athlete as soon as you make the decision to improve your lifestyle. Celebrate each healthy choice: every time you say no to that bag of chips, every time you choose vegetables, every time you eat a smaller portion. Don't be too hard on yourself when you make an unhealthy choice; just focus on doing better the next time.

Exercising Regularly

Finding time to take care of our bodies is another challenge many of us face. Exercise is an important part of stress reduction for many reasons, including:

- Exercise makes you stronger, and therefore more resilient to stress.
- Exercise helps clear your mind, reducing the harmful effects of stress.
- Exercise can help you work out the negative emotions that can result from stress, such as anger and frustration.
- Exercise can also give you time alone to think through stressful situations.

There are two main ways to approach exercise: thirty minutes per day, or three to five one-hour sessions per

week. If possible, try to find some activities that you enjoy. If you are having trouble finding the time to exercise, try these tips.

- Take a walk at lunch.
- Walk or bike to or from work, if possible.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator. (You will be surprised at how many extra calories you burn!)
- When watching television, use commercial breaks to do quick exercises, such as crunches, planks, or stretches.
- Stand when talking on the phone. (This will also help your muscles stretch and prevent muscle tension.)

Remember, diet, sleep, and exercise are all lifestyle changes. Start slowly, build your commitment steadily, stay positive and focused, and you've got a recipe for success!

Sleeping Well

The last building block of a healthy lifestyle is sleep. We know it is one more thing that you may not have time for. Trust us; you don't have time not to sleep!

Here are some scary statistics taken from a recent Sleep in America poll (performed by the National Sleep Foundation, based in the United States).

- 43% of adults stated that they had a good night's sleep almost every night. An additional 25% say that they get a good night's sleep a few nights a week.
- The average person needs 7 hours and 18 minutes for a good night's sleep, but receives only 6 hours and 40 minutes. That doesn't sound like a big difference, but over the course of the year that's about 230 hours of sleep debt!
- 28% of adults stated that sleepiness interfered with their daily activities at least a few days a month. 5% reported that it does so almost every day.
- About a quarter of adults have driven while drowsy.

Try these tips to help you get a good night's sleep.

- Use your bed just for sleeping – not for reading, watching TV, working, etc. Likewise, try to sleep just in your bed, not on the couch or in the armchair.
- Make your bedroom a comfortable place, with curtains to keep light out, an appropriate amount of blankets, and no noise or distractions.
- Try to go to bed and get up around the same time each day.
- Have a routine before you go to bed. A cup of tea, a few stretches, a few moments of meditation, a warm bath, and quiet music are all great ways to relax.

Practical Illustration

Pete was asleep at his desk. Lori walked by and had to climb over a mountain of junk food to get to him and wake him up before their boss saw him. She told Pete he needed to quit being a bump on a log and get into gear. Pete had a monstrous deadline and had been skipping meals and sleep to beat the clock. Lori warned him that the junk food and the lack of sleep would be the death of him. She reached in her snack drawer and pulled out a garden of healthy snacks and encouraged Pete to get up and walk around. Following her advice, Pete felt more energetic immediately and was inspired to get more exercise and eat healthier treats to keep fuel in his engine and promised to sleep at home and not at his desk.

Chapter Three: Altering the Situation

Now that we have the basic building blocks of a stress-reduced lifestyle, let's talk about how we deal with stress.

We've heard the saying, "A leopard can't change its spots," but we'd like to disagree. When dealing with stress, there are often many ways in which you can change your approach or the situation to make it less stressful.

The First A

As we have mentioned, your first option when dealing with stress is to alter the situation or your approach to it.

You can alter your approach by:

- Thinking positively and having a positive attitude
- Improving specific skills that will help you manage the situation
- Doing something differently

Some examples:

- You always find going to the dentist stressful. You decide to think positively about it: "Well, if I get this over with, it will be done for a whole year." You also decide to bring along some relaxing music to help you cope with the appointment.

- You find interacting with a particular co-worker stressful because they tend to be very aggressive. You decide to take some communication and assertiveness training.
- Traffic has become heavy on your morning commute. You decide to take a different route.

Identifying Appropriate Situations

Altering the situation is one of the most effective steps you can take towards managing your stress. By taking control of the situation and changing it to be less stressful, you are putting the power back in your hands.

However, there are a few instances where altering the situation is not appropriate, including situations where:

- Altering the situation is not safe. (For example, you find wearing your seatbelt claustrophobic, so you don't wear it.)
- Altering the situation means transferring the stress to someone else. (That's just mean!)

Creating Effective Actions

There are also some appropriate and inappropriate actions to consider when altering a situation. Make sure that the benefit will be worth the effort in the long term. For example, you may want to take a different route to avoid traffic, but if that route will take you 40 minutes out of your way and cause more stress, it may not be worth it.

Make sure that your actions are helpful and kind to all involved. Adding negativity to your life will not help reduce stress.

Practical Illustration

Sally was about to lose her head. Her neighbor in the next cubicle was a chatter box. He interrupted her all day long. Sally had enough and lodged a complaint to her boss, John. He was no stranger to the constant humming of Sally's neighbor. John suggested that Sally should point the finger at herself and fix how she reacted to the long-windowed neighbor and nip the problem in the bud. Sally decided to give it a shot and marched back to her cubicle determined to turn the tables on her neighbor and laid down the law and informed him that the noise disturbed her and that she would be happy to chat on lunch breaks but not during work hours. The neighbor agreed and they were allowed to work in peace.

Chapter Four: Avoiding the Situation

In the previous Chapter, we talked about taking power over the situation and changing it to make it less stressful. In this Chapter, we will explore another way to take power over stressful situations: by avoiding them entirely.

The Second A

The second A stands for Avoid. If drinking coffee gives you indigestion, and causes you stress and embarrassment at work, don't drink coffee!

This A is all about identifying the things that you needlessly stress about, and how to remove those items from your life.

Identifying Appropriate Situations

Avoiding the situation is appropriate if:

- Repercussions are non-existent or extremely minor
- Other people are not negatively impacted

Do not use this approach if:

- Avoiding will cause more stress in the long term than the short term (for example, avoiding the dentist or doctor's office)

- Avoiding will transfer stress to someone else
- Avoiding will negatively impact your health and/or safety

Creating Effective Actions

One of the most powerful tools for avoiding a stressful situation is the Positive No. This tool enables you to say no in a way that maintains control over the situation, but does so in a constructive, assertive way.

The Positive No comes in several forms.

- Say no, followed by an honest explanation, such as, “I am uncomfortable doing that because...”
- Say no and then briefly clarify your reasoning without making excuses. This helps the listener to better understand your position. Example: “I can’t visit our neighbor right now because I promised Jenny I would take her to the playground.”
- Say no, and then give an alternative. Example: “I don’t have time today, but I could schedule it in for tomorrow morning.”
- Empathetically repeat the request in your own words, and then say no. Example: “I understand that

you want everyone to partake in the roast beef supper, but I do not eat beef.”

- Provide an assertive refusal and repeat it no matter what the person says. This approach may be most appropriate with aggressive or manipulative people and can be an effective strategy to control your emotions. Example: “I understand how you feel, but I will not [or cannot]...” Remember to stay focused and not become sidetracked into responding to other issues.

Remember; only use this approach in appropriate situations, as discussed in the previous topic.

Practical Illustration

Frank was walking all over Eddie by putting more on Eddie's plate. Eddie already had a growing list of tasks to complete and Frank had harpooned him into doing more work. Eddie was feeling worn down. As long as Eddie allowed Frank to pile on the chores, Eddie would sink into the abyss. Eddie decided to assert himself following the advice of other coworkers and hailed Frank over to witness the mountain of tasks that were taking over his office. Eddie told Frank that although he'd like to help, he had his own hill to climb and couldn't let Frank drag him down anymore. Frank saw that he had pushed Eddie too far and decided to tighten his own reins and do his own work.

Chapter Five: Accepting the Situation

Benjamin Franklin once said, “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” Our final A will help us cope with those things that cannot be changed.

The Third A

Our third A will help us deal with those things in life that just need to be done, even though they are unpleasant.

Accepting the situation as it is, and being as positive as possible about it, is what this third A is all about. You can even use some of the principles from the first A to alter your attitude and make the situation a little less stressful!

Some examples include:

- Going to the dentist
- Taking a turn presenting a team project instead of passing it off to someone else
- Visiting a lonely neighbor who tends to be unpleasant

Identifying Appropriate Situations

Accepting the situation is appropriate when:

- The task must be done eventually
- Avoiding or altering it would cause undue stress to you or another person

Accepting the situation is not appropriate when:

- You are doing so just to please others
- Avoiding or altering it would reduce your stress more than accepting it
- You are accepting it because you feel you have no choice

Creating Effective Actions

Some people feel that accepting stressful situations and living through them makes them powerless. This is not true. With this model, you are choosing to accept the situation rather than to alter or avoid it. Often, having that power of choice can reduce stress greatly.

Another tactic that can help you accept a situation is positive thinking, as discussed in the first A. Or, identify the benefits of accepting this situation. Earlier, we used the example of taking a turn presenting a team project instead of passing it off to someone else. If you went ahead and presented the team project, you could gain many things from it, including:

- Respect from managers and co-workers
- Self-respect
- More confidence and experience when speaking in public

Practical Illustration

Richard dreaded public speaking. It was his turn to bite the bullet and make a speech to a standing room only crowd. Just thinking about it made him jittery. Janine felt his pain and offered to help Richard get over his fear. Richard had the words, but the cat had his tongue and wouldn't let him get the words out of his mouth. Janine modeled her public speaking techniques using the words Richard wrote until Richard found the wind in his sails and, with Janine's brilliant advice, he was able to put one foot in front of the other, step up on stage in front of his peers, and implement her ideas. Janine glowed with pride as Richard knocked it out of the park with his eloquent speech.

Chapter Six: Using Routines to Reduce Stress

Routines allow us to systematize the unchanging elements of our life, so that you can spend your energy on more worthwhile projects. By planning meals in advance, having a system for chores, and using to-do lists, you can run a more efficient environment and have fewer things to worry about.

Planning Meals

Here are some ideas to make proper meals a part of your household.

- Take an hour on the weekend to plan meals, create a grocery list, and go shopping. Make sure to include anyone who lives in your household.
- In the grocery store, stay around the outer perimeter, where fresh fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairy are usually kept. Try to stay away from frozen and processed items.
- Take advantage of non-processed shortcuts, like pre-trimmed meat, salad kits, and pre-grated cheese.
- If you find it hard to keep fresh fruit in the house, try stocking up on frozen fruit.

- Try experimenting with slow cookers. They are inexpensive to purchase, use inexpensive ingredients, are easy to use, and they enable you to have supper ready as soon as you get home.
- Theme nights, like tacos or personal pizzas, are a great way to customize individual meals and encourage family members to try new things. Just remember to load up on the veggies and go easy on the dough and cheese.

By planning meals in advance, you'll accomplish two things: you will reduce your stress during the week, as meals will be planned, and you will eat better and feel better!

Organizing Chores

It's also helpful to build routines around chores. Every person over the age of three in your household should help with chores. To make chores more palatable, we suggest that the household jointly make a list of things that need to be done, and then each person can choose a few tasks. Unpleasant tasks, like cleaning the bathroom, can be rotated.

Younger children can perform tasks like:

- Setting the table
- Making their bed

- Sorting laundry
- Feeding pets
- Preparing some parts of meals, like salad kits

Older children can help with tasks like:

- Helping to cook meals
- Helping younger children with their chores
- Loading and unloading the dishwasher
- Folding and putting away laundry

Having assigned tasks, and designated times to perform those tasks, will help you keep a clean, orderly household. In the end, it means there's that much less to worry about.

Using a To-Do List

A to-do list is one of the most powerful life management tools that there is. Best of all, it is inexpensive and easy to use. It can be customized for home or work, and it can be used by individuals or families.

To manage household tasks, we suggest creating a Productivity Binder. At the front, place a calendar for the month. Next, place loose-leaf pages in the binder and label each with a date of the month. On each page, make a list of the things to be done that day and who is responsible for each item. Cross each item off when it is complete.

Incomplete items can be transferred to the next day. The binder format makes it easy to keep your family calendar and to-do list in one spot, plus newsletters, reminders, flyers, and other important information.

At the back of the binder, you can keep calendars for subsequent months so that events and to-do items can be recorded as they come up. At the end of the month, simply remove the old calendar, and move the new calendar from the back of the book to the front.

Individuals can use this approach as well, although you may want to use a spiral notebook for portability.

We recommend keeping separate journals for work and home to maintain your optimum work/life balance.

Practical Illustration

Joe had a ton of work to do. With his boss breathing down his neck, Joe was up to his ears with unfinished tasks. Mike came to the rescue and showed Joe how to tame his chaos by organizing his desktop clutter into a manageable productivity binder; breaking gigantic tasks into small chores; and developing a solid plan of action to conquer his growing lists of workplace responsibilities without losing his head or his job. With Mike's help they were able to put these plans into action and make Joe's life easier by reducing his stress thus giving him more energy to not only keep the creative juices flowing, but to become a rising star in his workplace.

Chapter Seven: Environmental Relaxation Techniques

So far, we have talked about how to create a stress-reducing lifestyle, and how to reduce the impact of stressful situations. Despite all these preventative steps, stress will still happen. When it does, it's important to have some tools to keep cool.

Finding a Sanctuary

Have you ever wished that you could just escape to a personal paradise when things get tough? Perhaps you imagine a tropical beach, or a cozy campsite in the middle of the woods. Although escapism isn't a good plan long-term, having a mental place to escape to and regroup can be a useful tool.

To create your personal sanctuary, start by thinking of your favorite place. It can be anywhere – a tropical island, a snowy mountain, an exotic jungle... wherever you feel most relaxed and safe.

Now, use your senses to capture all the elements of your sanctuary.

- What do you see?
- What does it smell like?

- What does it taste like? (For example, you may be able to taste the salt in the air by the ocean.)
- How does it make you feel?
- What textures do you associate with this place?
- What sounds would you hear?

Feel free to create a physical sanctuary by writing down your observations, drawing a picture, or even tucking away a physical piece of it (like a rock or leaf) in your desk.

Using Music

Music can also be a great soother for the soul. Experts believe that the rhythm has powerful effects on our bodies.

If you need to relax, try to listen to some calming music. Jazz, classical, and even nature sounds are great ways to transport you to another place and give you time to unwind and regroup after a stressful situation. Music with an upbeat tempo can help you get back in the groove and up your mood.

If you are musically inclined, playing an instrument and singing along can relieve a ton of physical and mental tension. (Even if you aren't musically inclined, put on your favorite song and sing along! We guarantee it will make you feel better.)

Seeing the Humor

Humor is another great stress reliever. It has been scientifically proven that a good belly laugh lowers blood pressure, reduces hormones created by stress, gives the immune system a boost, and creates a sense of well-being and happiness.

Remember these points when using humor as stress relief.

- Reading a funny story or joke can be a great way to make you laugh.
- Keeping a humorous calendar in your cubicle is a good way to have a laugh at hand, particularly if it's the page-a-day type. Just make sure it's appropriate and permitted in your office.
- Seeing the humor in a stressful situation can be difficult, but it can also help you put things in perspective. Try to imagine how the situation might appear from the outside, or how you might see it down the road.
- Sharing a laugh with friends and family is always a good pick-me-up. When sharing jokes at work, be sensitive to others, and make sure that what you're sharing is appropriate.

Practical Illustration

Sylvia needed a break. She was so stressed, steam came out of her ears and she looked like she hadn't slept for a year. Her coworker, Ann, approached her with caution not wanting to cause an eruption. Ann asked what she could do to help. Sylvia spat a response that almost sent Ann running for the hills. Understanding that Sylvia needed to let off some steam, Ann lent her ear and offered Sylvia advice to soothe her soul. After an eternity, Sylvia agreed that playing her favorite tunes and creating a little oasis at her desk gave her stress a mini-vacation and allowed her to continue working without blowing her stack. Ann's advice to dig up treasures Sylvia loves and squeeze them into her daily routine saved Sylvia a ton of time and allowed her to become a more productive happy employee.

Chapter Eight Physical Relaxation Techniques

Stress can cause many physical side effects, including:

- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Obesity
- Digestive problems
- Increased susceptibility to illness
- Increased risk of heart attack and stroke

These effects increase the longer you are stressed, and the higher your stress level. Having some ways to reduce the effects of stress on our bodies and mind is important.

Soothing Stretches

Having some quick, easy stretches in your stress management toolbox will help you ease some of the physical

tension caused by stress. In fact, these can (and should) be used several times a day to help prevent muscle tension and feelings of stress. Although these activities are not particularly strenuous, it's always best to check with a doctor before trying any physical activity, especially if you have health problems.

Neck Roll: Let your chin hang down to your chest. Next, slowly roll your head to your left side, so that your left ear is near your left shoulder. Roll your head backwards and let your head hang as far back as is comfortable. Now, slowly roll your head to the right, so that your right ear is near your right shoulder. Continue rolling your head until your chin is once again hanging to your chest. Now, repeat the process, but go in the other direction (so that you begin by rolling your head to your right shoulder.)

Shoulder Shrug: Relax your shoulders. Slowly shrug towards the front of our body and upwards. Next, shrug your shoulders down towards the back of your body. When your shoulders are back in their natural position, relax, and then repeat the exercise in the opposite direction.

Side Stretch: Stand with your left hand on your left hip. Place your right hand straight out so that it is perpendicular to your body. Slowly stretch your right hand over your head, to the left, and bend to the left at the waist as far as is comfortable. Stretch for a moment, and then slowly return to the standing position. Repeat for the opposite side.

Lumbar Stretch: Stand and place both hands in the small of your back. Arch your back slowly, feeling the stretch. Repeat three times.

The key to these exercises is to do them slowly and regularly. They are also very effective when combined with deep breathing, which just happens to be our next topic!

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is an excellent relaxation tool that can be adapted for almost any situation. It also has some physical benefits, including:

- Reduction in blood pressure
- Reduction in muscle tension
- Boost in metabolism
- Clearing of the mind
- Boost in endorphins (our natural painkillers)

The basic technique is just like it sounds: slowly breathe in through your nose, and then breathe out through your mouth. Try counting slowly as you do this. Each breath should take ten to twenty seconds. (You will be able to take longer breaths with practice.)

When you are in a stressful situation, it is easy to unobtrusively deep breathe to keep yourself cool. This will also help prevent some of the harmful physical effects of stress, since stress causes us to breathe faster, making our bodies work harder.

If you have a few moments to yourself, sit down, close your eyes, and spend a few minutes deep breathing. Deep breathing can also be used in conjunction with picturing your sanctuary or stretching.

Tensing and Relaxing

Believe it or not, intentionally creating tension is a relaxation technique – as long as you remember to relax afterwards!

Try this: bunch your hands up into fists as tight as possible. Now, slowly let your fingers roll out, feeling the tension evaporate from your hands and fingers. Try it again, slower. For maximum effect, deep breathe while tensing and relaxing.

You can try this with almost any part of your body. Here are some examples:

- Scrunch your eyes up
- Curl your toes towards your shins
- Make a big frown and then smile
- Tense your abs as tight as you can

You can even purposely tense yourself from your toes all the way up to your head, and then relax from your head to your toes. Remember, the key is to go slowly, and deep breathe if possible while tensing and relaxing.

Meditation

Meditation is the ancient art of moving your mind into a deeper state of awareness through relaxation. There are many forms of meditation, including religious and non-religious methods.

Most forms of meditation involve sitting or lying in a comfortable position and tensing and relaxing certain groups of muscles while deep breathing. Other forms focus simply on breathing and emptying one's mind. We suggest doing some research on the Internet or at the local library to find information on the various methods, as they are far too diverse to cover here. You can also consult a yoga studio or your church.

Our challenge to you: Try meditating once a day for thirty days and see how it makes you feel!

Practical Illustration

Steve was foaming at the mouth after a long day of interruption after interruption. His coworkers, Earl and James, trembled with fear after surviving 8 long hours with the unpredictable volcano ready to erupt in the cubicle in between theirs. They wanted to help before allowing Steve to get on the road and exact his wrath on the masses. Deciding that showing rather than telling was probably better, they sat in their chairs and modeled relaxation techniques. Earl started deep breathing while James did side stretches. Steve wondered if everyone had lost their marbles and grumbled at their circus routine. They convinced him to give some stretches a shot. He did in hopes of having them shut their traps. Within a few moments, he felt better. Liking the results, Steve continued to use the techniques and declared his cubicle a stress-free zone from now on.

Chapter Nine: Coping with Major Events

The tools that we have discussed so far will help you manage and reduce stress in your everyday life. However, as you encounter stressful events, your toolbox will have to grow, too. This Chapter will explore how to prepare for major stressful events, and what to do when those events happen.

Establishing a Support System

The building blocks that we have discussed so far will help you survive a major stressful event. If you already have a minimal amount of stress and a low-stress lifestyle, you will be one step ahead of the game.

Maintaining a strong network of family and friends is also important. Keep in touch with your social support system even in good times. Remember, you can use the tools we've discussed in this workshop to help others through stressful situations.

Creating a Plan

When a stressful event arises (or if you anticipate a stressful event), creating a plan can give you a much-needed sense of control. With a plan, you can feel like you're at least a little

bit on top of things, and that you have power over the situation. Often, people find that making lists and planning (even if it's for the short term) restores a bit of order and control to their life.

Things to think about include:

- How can I maintain a healthy lifestyle (with appropriate amounts of diet, sleep, and exercise) during this period?
- What changes will I need to make to my lifestyle?
- How will my routine help me during this period?
- How might my routine change?
- How can I use the triple "A" approach to handle this situation?
- What relaxation techniques might be appropriate?
- What support systems can I rely on?

Remember, stress is individual, and therefore your approach should be too. If you simply can't find the time to exercise during this stressful period, for example, and can manage only a ten minute walk per day, accept that as your new routine. This is not the time for you to put additional pressure on yourself.

After the stressful event is over, try to return to your normal routine as soon as possible. This will help restore order to your life and return your stress levels to normal.

Knowing When to Seek Help

Despite your best efforts, some situations are just too stressful to handle on your own. It is never a bad idea to ask for professional help with stress. Having an objective third party to talk to and get feedback from can be an important part of your support system.

If you're wondering where to find help, start at your workplace. Many employers offer confidential employee assistance programs. If your organization doesn't offer these types of programs, look online for local mental health services or hotlines in your area.

It makes sense that large events will cause large amounts of stress. However, several small stress-causing events that happen in close proximity can cause exponential amounts of stress. For example, imagine a month marked by these events: getting in a fender-bender, making a significant mistake at work, having an argument with your spouse, and coming down with a bad cold. You could probably cope with each individual event as it happened.

Now, imagine if all of these events happened in the space of a few days. Your stress level would be much higher, and you would probably find it far more difficult to cope. Think of the straw that broke the camel's back.

Remember, different things are stressful to different people.
Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it is a mark of
intelligence and strength.

Practical Illustration

Dave and sue were organizing a meeting to help their coworker, Paula, get through a hard time in her life. They joined forces to round up a support network of Paula's friends and family to provide the assistance she needed and to show Paula that despite their individual duties, they all took responsibility for their team members and would move mountains to make things happen and better what seemed like an impossible situation by creating a strong network of united guys and gals to create a plan to climb over that mountain and find a solution to any problem. With the help of a few friends and a supportive network of eager beavers to pull Paula through whatever woes she may have had and help her succeed.

Chapter Ten: Our Challenge to You

We have discussed many tools in this workshop, and we hope that our ideas have sparked some thoughts on how you can manage and reduce stress. However, it's hard to know how to solve a problem if you don't know what the problem really is! This Chapter will explore how to use a stress log system to identify, reduce, and manage stressors.

Creating a Stress Log

A stress log can help you identify your major stressors, and it can help you identify trends in those stressors. Identifying the cause of stress can help you reduce the number and impact of stressors in your life, and it can help you manage the stress that does occur.

A basic stress log is pictured on the next page.

What happened?
When did it happen?
Where did it happen?
How high was my stress level, on a scale of one to ten? (1=Not Stressed, 5=Moderately Stressed, 10=Close to a nervous breakdown)
How did I feel?
Why did this event cause me stress?
What did I do about it?
What would I like to do differently next time?

We suggest that you copy this form into a three-ring binder or a spiral notebook. You can modify this form to suit your needs, but we recommend keeping the basic fields intact, as it will help with the

Week One: Recording Events

The first stage of using a stress log is to gather information. For seven days, fill out your stress log each time you feel stressed or anxious. We also recommend writing a journal entry each night, summarizing the day and your stress-related feelings.

Week Two: Identifying Stressors and Creating a Plan

When the first week is over, sit down with your journal and a blank piece of paper. First, take a moment to write down your overall stress level based on the one to ten scale used in your stress log.

Now, write down the events that caused the highest stress levels. Next, write down the events that caused stress most frequently. Finally, add events that you know are stressful but were not captured during the past week.

From this, identify your major stressors and create a plan for each. Some things to think about include:

- Which A (Alter, Avoid, Accept) might be appropriate in dealing with this situation?

- How could lifestyle changes (in diet, sleep, exercise, routine, and organization) help alleviate this stress?
- What relaxation techniques could help me cope with this stress?
- What resources (such as support systems and outside help) can help me reduce this stressor?
- What will my final plan look like?

In order to be successful, your final stress management plan should set small, achievable goals that have a reasonable time frame for completion.

If you cannot think of a way to identify a particular stressor, try consulting friends and family. If you are really stuck for a plan, set it aside and review it later.

Week Three: Creating New Habits

Now it's time for the exciting part: putting your plan into action. Take one or two small parts of your stress management plan at a time and incorporate them into your life. Try each part for a week or two. If it works, make it a part of your lifestyle or stress management approach. If it doesn't work, make a note of your efforts and move on. Continue incorporating new tools and habits into your lifestyle in this way.

Reviewing and Evaluating

In the beginning, we recommend reviewing your stress management plan weekly or bi-weekly. Think about these things.

- What was my stress level the last time I reviewed my plan?
- What is my stress level now?
- What has changed?
- What stressors have been added to my life?
- What stressors have been removed from my life?
- How should my plan change?
- What stress management techniques have been working for me? What techniques have not been working? How should my plan change?
- What is my plan for the next week?
- When will I review my plan again?

Once you have started to develop a good stress management strategy, you can reduce your review to once a month or less – whatever works for you. If you find your

stress levels starting to rise, go back to week one and work through the process again.

Practical Illustration

Sam scratched his head not understanding why the notebook marked 'stress log' was on top of the mountain of work on his desk. Jill noticed his confusion and filled him in on the secret. She told him that everyone noticed that little mishaps would send him into a panic and they feared he'd implode. To help him battle his frustrations, she suggested he keep a log of all the things that put him over the edge. Sam protested. Recognizing that the redness in his face was another indication of uncontrolled stress, he agreed to keep a log. Jill volunteered to keep him on the straight and narrow. After a week, Sam realized he let undue stress control his life and he and Jill researched ways to control that and Sam was able to stop a situation from wreaking havoc on day and implemented techniques to make him breathe easier.

Conclusion

Although this workshop is coming to a close, we hope that your journey to improve your stress management skills is just beginning. Please take a moment to review and update your action plan. This will be a key tool to guide your progress in the days, weeks, months, and years to come. We wish you the best of luck on the rest of your travels!

Words from the Wise

- **Benjamin Franklin:** Do not anticipate trouble or worry about what may never happen.
- **Adabella Radici:** If your teeth are clenched and your fists are clenched, your lifespan is probably clenched.
- **Henry Kissinger:** There cannot be a stressful crisis next week. My schedule is already full.