

BALANCE

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Building Resilience to Prepare for Stress

Don't wait until you are on the skids with stress. Go on the offensive by building resilience and developing behaviors and attitudes that deflect stress before it even arrives. Building resilience is not a passing pop-psychology fad. The American Psychological Association has weighed in on the strategy and endorsed a 10-step approach. How many of these tips do you follow? Which ones would be good to work on more?

- 1) Build effective, supportive relationships with others.
- 2) Avoid “catastrophizing” (seeing crises as insurmountable).
- 3) View change as part of life, with new opportunities accompanying it.
- 4) Be proactive. Move toward your goals. Don't let things just happen *to* you.
- 5) When faced with problems, act decisively. Don't just go with the flow.
- 6) In the midst of a crisis (or sometime soon after), ask yourself, “Can this event change my life for the better in some way?”
- 7) Nurture a view of yourself that includes the ability to withstand adversity.
- 8) Practice *not* zeroing in on the worst part about a crisis or adverse experience.
- 9) During a tough time, practice looking forward to the hoped-for conclusion and resolution while avoiding the visualization of your worst fears.
- 10) Take care of yourself by maintaining your physical and mental health, because this makes it easier to bounce back when adversity strikes.

Thinking Backward to Achieve Goals

Most people know it's important to have goals, but they don't write them down. Those who do often neglect to describe them in detail. As a result, some people may remain frustrated with only vague longings and desires that never materialize – in part because they have not formulated the steps necessary to achieve them. Here's an exercise worth trying: After specifying your goal, make it specific. Decide what, where, how much, etc. Now, work backward to formulate your steps. For example, if your goal is to buy a house, what must happen before you can do it? You need a date, of course. So decide on the date you will buy your house. Keep going—what comes before that? You need to choose a house. And before that, you need a real estate agent. And before that, you need to qualify for a loan. And before that, what must happen? Keep going backward, asking, “Before event X, what must occur?” You will uncover the numerous incremental steps required to achieve your goal. The more steps you write down, the more attainable your goal may become since each step is likely to be more manageable. This approach to goal attainment helps establish a realistic timeline, which can be instrumental to your success. This procedure also transforms your longings and desires into smart, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-specific goals, which can fuel your energy and your intention to achieve what you want.



Five-Minute Stress Zapper

This stress zapper takes only minutes to do, but once completed, it can give relief for days or even weeks. As you sit at your desk, look around the room. Look for things in your environment that add to your stress—trash can too far away; boxes taking up the space under your desk; a burnt-out light bulb; the lack of suitable bulletin board for notes, Post-its, and stray to-dos; dust; your path blocked by things on the floor that need to be stacked, tossed, or moved; clutter on your desk taking up elbow room; no green plant(s); a squeaky chair, a clock that requires you to twist your neck to see...What's needling you? These micro-stressors tend to swell in their combined impact, so zap them and feel the difference.

Heavy Smokers Can Quit

Research shows at any given time the majority of smokers at any given time are interested in quitting. In addition, 51 percent of smokers in the most recent national study tried quitting in the past year; 20 percent succeeded—about one in five. Here's the kicker: If you are a heavy smoker—officially, more than 20 cigarettes a day—you are almost twice as likely to be successful if you decide to quit smoking!

Source: Smoking in the U.S. Workforce, National Health Interview Survey [NHIS] and the Tobacco Use Supplement to the Current Population Survey, 2003.

Introducing "Freecycling"

You already know about recycling, but you may not have heard of a more recent earth-friendly movement with big payoffs—freecycling. The Freecycle Network™ is made up of 4,745 groups in communities around the globe. Chances are there's a freecycling group in your area. It's a grassroots movement and an entirely nonprofit network of people who are giving (and getting) stuff for free that is based on reusing and easing the burden on our landfills. Each local group is moderated by a local volunteer. Have stuff in your garage or basement that you want to get rid of but not throw away? Freecycling may be for you. Learn more at www.freecycle.org.

Parents: Beware of Eating Disorder Web Sites

You can find almost anything on the Internet, including Web sites that can worsen serious eating disorders. Called "pro-Ana" Web sites because they promote anorexia and similar illnesses, they often have loyal followings. Evidence that your child may be visiting such Web sites can provide important early signs to the potential onset of an eating disorder or reveal an existing, though well-hidden, illness. Many of these Web sites focus on helping victims "do it right." Some pro-Ana Web sites masquerade as helpful resources, weaving useful and accurate information into their mixed messages. Unfortunately, these home-built, privately run Web sites may encourage eating disorders. Photos of glamorized models and famous ultra-thin people are used for inspiration, and discussion forums encourage inappropriate weight-loss goals. In addition, these Web sites often hook users and bond them into superficial online friendships. The result is a normalization of these illnesses that can make it tougher to overcome, to have effective relationships with parents or loved ones, and to maintain positive mental health. Pro-Ana sites usually contain images of overly thin people to inspire others with eating disorders to stay focused on their misguided weight-loss goals. With slogans like "You can control your life from the inside out" and "If it tastes good, it's trying to kill you," these Web sites have their own language. For example, the phrase "my 'thinspo,'" is slang for "my thin inspiration." It refers to anything—usually an image or a video—that inspires a person with an eating disorder to keep losing more weight.

Save Money on Groceries

How many times do you go to the grocery store in a week? Is it more than once? If so, here is a great way to save money over the next month: Stop this practice. Try shopping for groceries only once per week. You are less likely to put items in your shopping basket that you do not need. These expenditures can add up. So, make a list and stick to it for a once-per-week visit.

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Do you secretly worry that others will find out that your reputation doesn't match your capabilities? Do you tend to view your accomplishments as dumb luck, being in the right place at the right time, or perhaps the result of good social skills and likability? When you do succeed, do you think, "Wow, that was a close call—I fooled them, somehow." This phenomenon is often referred to as "imposter syndrome," and it's been studied for nearly 40 years. Up to 70 percent of successful people suffer from it to some degree, so it's not unusual, but it can be a serious roadblock to getting where you want to go in your career. The gap between what you know and what you are trying to learn can produce feelings of anxiety and fraudulence—imposter syndrome. In worst-case scenarios, some employees even quit their jobs to prevent being "unmasked." Don't do it! It's good to challenge yourself to hit the next target or career goal, even if you don't yet have every single skill required to be a master. If imposter syndrome is forcing you to refuse promotions or reject tough assignments that others think match your abilities, talk to a counselor, read about imposter syndrome, or talk to your employee assistance professional. Organizations naturally admire leaders and achievers, and if you possess technical skills, good self-awareness, natural abilities, and an engaging style, you will get tapped for these roles. But remember, don't let imposter syndrome rule.

Priority Points

If you could only conquer procrastination, you'd see your productivity soar, right? To get leverage, try assigning point values rather than priorities to items on your to-do list. When completed tasks add up to predetermined total point values, give yourself a reward. Make it a good one. Head for a great movie after work, have a pedicure, or simply get together and socialize with friends you haven't seen in a while. Almost any reward can be effective, and over time this strategy can help you accomplish a number of goals you once thought impossible.

Family Role in Addiction Treatment

If you have a family member entering treatment for alcoholism or another drug addiction, you have a very important homework assignment—getting involved in the addiction treatment program's family education and counseling program. Addiction is a family disease—not because families cause it, but because the behavior of the addict and the long-term adaptation by family members to it adversely affect everyone in a personal way—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Recovery is the name of the game for everyone, not just the patient. The family program will give you the guidance you need. If one is not available, get a plan of action from a knowledgeable counselor or employee assistance professional. Don't skip the family program since inattention to your own recovery can result in you continuing to think or behave in ways that do not support or can jeopardize your family member's recovery program.

Fast Formula for Conflict Resolution

Conflict is normal between people, so memorize the shortest formula in the world for resolving it. With practice, you can sidestep the emotional part of conflict that can make it last longer. Formula:

- 1) Acknowledge the differences between parties.
Recognize, understand, validate, and hear the other party's differences.
- 2) Let the parties express their feelings.
- 3) Form an agreement on what is not being disputed—those aspects related to the conflict where differences do not exist.
- 4) Agree on a common goal—and work backwards to negotiate an agreement. Secret: chip away at what you are willing to give up.



Payoffs for Not Sweating the Small Stuff

Just reported, a long-term study examined the health of seven-year-olds to see what kind of health problems they came to experience later in their mid-30s—and whether those participants with fewer health problems had exhibited attitude or behavioral differences from their peers at age seven. Results: Those in their mid-30s with fewer physical health problems had exhibited better skills at age seven when it came to staying focused and not sweating the small stuff. A superior attention span and a more positive outlook in youth seem to have had a positive effect on health in older subjects. Could the study provide evidence that behavior and emotions associated with certain temperaments play a crucial role in long-term health? Help children cope with frustrations and alter their way of responding to distressful events. It may influence positive health outcomes later in life.

Source: Health Psychology, May 2009.

Water Safety Tip Worth Heeding

Summer is here, which often means more time spent boating and swimming. Consider this rarely reported safety tip: Stay out of the water when you are around boats using electricity at a dock to avoid the possibility of being shocked by an electrical current leaking into the water. Only a small current is needed to cause paralysis and possible drowning. If you feel tingling sensations while swimming toward a boat, a boat lift, or a dock—back away and get out of the water.

To speak with an EAP professional,
please call: **800.999.1077**

