



Stress Is For Suckers

By Tim Brownson

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Introduction

The word stress is bandied around more freely than vodka at a Polish wedding. Would you be surprised to learn that stress, as we tend to use the term, only exists in our minds?

In fact, I'll go even further and say there is no such thing as stress per se.

Think of any event that currently "stresses you out". Ask yourself if there is any person in the world who could deal with that same situation without any stress at all.

Where did the stress disappear to with this person? Did it strip naked on a beach, dump its clothes in a pile and dive into the ocean, never to be heard of again? Or was stress simply a figment of your mind's overactive imagination?

If the answer is yes (and by the way, that is the only sensible answer you can give), then by definition the event is not stressful. The interpretation that you place on the event may create stress.

If I picked up a bathroom plunger and then brutally shoved it into your face and pumped it two or three times until your eye popped out, you would experience pain.

There's no need for you to think, "Hmm, there seems to be a hole where once my eye was. I'm sure that should hurt," before you start shrieking hysterically and rolling around on the floor with blood pouring from your now very empty eye socket, swearing to wreak revenge. Those reactions will all happen quite naturally.



That's what we call cause and effect. One event causes another to happen without any further intervention from your conscious mind.

Stress isn't like that, though. With stress, something occurs between cause and effect: our interpretation of the events we experience. Without interpretation of what the situation or event means to us, we have no stress.

If you think hard enough I'm sure you can come up with a negative event that you once managed really well and took in stride. I'm equally sure that you can think of another almost identical situation that you didn't deal with very well at all.



So what's the deal? They're the same event (or close to it). Why on earth shouldn't you manage them equally well (or equally poorly for that matter)?

You don't manage them the same because you have attached different meanings to these events. Maybe one situation was an interview for a job that didn't bother you much, so your nerves and stress levels were low. The next event was an interview for a job that meant a lot to you and you were really hoping to land it.

Hey, presto. The butterflies arrived as did the dry mouth, the sweaty palms and the feeling of nausea.

Maybe, though, it wasn't interpretation as such, but your resistance was a tad lower than normal because things weren't quite going your way. It could be that you were already in a bad mood, not feeling well, drunk, tired, or in my case a customer of Directv. Any of those reasons could reduce your tolerance to stress.

That's going to reflect in how you react.

If, on the other hand, you're feeling great and life seems like a walk in a very nice park, then you laugh heartily in the face of stress and probably tweak its beard for good measure too.

As a life coach, I probably witness stress more often than most people do. Having said that, I'm sure that even the most hearing-impaired half-wit troglodyte encounters stress several times a day via words or actions.

People get stressed by work, by the kids, by their boss, by their spouse and by writing e-books on stress. Stress is pandemic and shows absolutely no sign of abating.

Ask yourself whether you've felt stressed at some point over the last couple of weeks. Now ask yourself if you've felt scared or frightened at some point over the last couple of weeks. If you really want to freak yourself out (let's face it; who doesn't?), replace the word stress with scared or fearful.

I know, I know. You're not in a perpetual state of fear, but look at all those other people! They obviously are.

"I'm stressed by work," could translate into, "I'm fearful of losing my job and not being able to provide for myself and/or my family".

"I'm stressed about giving a speech," in all likelihood means, "I'm scared I'll mess up and that people will laugh at me".

Even something as innocent as, "I'm stressed by my next-door neighbor playing loud music," probably means something like, "I'm petrified that I won't sleep well."



Then I'll be irritable at work, go on an axe-wielding rampage and butcher half the accounting department."

The next time you're ready to announce to the world that you're stressed senseless, try replacing what you were about to say with, "I'm scared shitless".

See how that changes your experience. See if living in a permanent state of fear is as acceptable to you as feeling stressed all the time. If it isn't, then maybe it's about time to do something rather than buying into the myth that chronic stress, like piles, is just something that you have to learn to live with.

Stress is a catchall term we use to describe different conditions including worry, fear, anxiety, overwhelm and lack of control.

However, if we are prepared to accept that we are the perpetrators of our stress - not our boss, not our partner, not the Government, not illegal immigrants and not even the puppy that just crapped on the carpet - then we can take steps to lighten the load we place on ourselves.

That's a much better option than looking for ways to justify feeling so wound up and reinforcing the urban myth that chronic stress is part of modern living.

This much better option means dealing with stress effectively.



I must point out at this stage that there is a beneficial form of stress. It's called eustress. Eustress is getting nervous before a big presentation, an important sports event or even asking for a date. It's also the physical stress that your body undergoes during a physical workout.

Eustress can help you perform more effectively by channeling your body's reserves where they are most needed. You don't want to nod off at a job interview; you want your senses heightened, your adrenaline pumping and your heart beating a little faster. These physical reactions help you focus and perform to your highest potential.

Problems arise when your body can't shut off the stress response or turns it on inappropriately. In isolation, that's not really a big deal, but over time and if it carries on unabated, stress can have a serious negative impact on your health. I'm not just talking about occasional sleepless nights either.

Stress is believed to kill millions of people worldwide every year both directly and indirectly. That is why it's important to understand your options.

There are three main ways to reduce chronic stress. The first and seemingly the most common is treating its symptoms with medication. There is a time and a place for this approach and it can be very valuable in certain circumstances.

However, I believe (as a layman) that medication should be used in conjunction with other methods and not in isolation. By implementing other methods, stress doesn't simply return when the patient stops taking medication because that person didn't discover and deal with any of the underlying causes of the stress.



It is useful to understand that medication is not usually a cure per se. Medication can help somebody feel much better by alleviating symptoms, but that's about it.

You may well be thinking, "Hm. What about chemical imbalances in the brain? Medication cures that." Well, maybe and maybe not, but what caused the imbalance in the first place? Isn't that the question we should look to answer?

The second method of reducing stress is to implement a change of lifestyle. The final method is to take a closer look and try to understand the internal processes that cause us to become stressed in the first place so that we can intervene.

Those two methods are what this e-book explores.





16 Ways to De-Stress Your Lifestyle

None of this is rocket science, as I said to my friend Bob who works at NASA . I'm confident that you can implement everything in this e-book with a bit of belief, commitment and perseverance.

Some of the tips and tricks will be obvious (and some even blindingly obvious), but a few tips will hopefully have you raising an eyebrow and thinking, "Hm. I never thought about that. Let's give it a try."

That is all that I ask for; that you give some of this your best shot.

1. Put yourself first

People often get the wrong impression when I say you should put yourself first. I don't mean to suggest you should be selfish or uncaring. I mean that you have to look after yourself otherwise you'll turn into a martyr. You should always be the most important person to you. Family and friends may only be a whisker behind, but you're number one!

Commit to taking time out for yourself on a regular basis.

Meditating for 30 minutes, reading quietly in a room alone or going on a 40-minute jog is not being selfish; it is being sensible by allowing you to re-group, re-energize and re-focus.



2. Learn to say no

Saying no to others is a good way of demonstrating that you are committed to putting yourself first so that you can then help others from a position of power.

Wow. I sounded almost Tony Robbinsish there.

If you think it's necessary to say yes to every request that's ever made of you, think again. It may seem like you have to take on extra work to get by in life, but that's simply not the case. In fact, the opposite is often true.

I'm sure you know somebody who is always willing to be the martyr for friends, family and/or colleagues. How successful is that person? How well respected is the individual? What is that person's self-esteem? Is the person living vicariously through other people's lives? Is the person happy with his or her own life? Would you want to be that person?

Think of a famous person that you admire. I'm willing to bet that the person says no at least 10 times (and maybe even closer to 100 times) for each occasion that the person says yes. These people have to say no, otherwise they would spend all their lives at shopping mall launches, kissing babies and meeting stalkers for coffee.

There's no shame in accepting that sometimes your plate is full. Taking on any extra tasks or favors benefits nobody.



3. Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake

Any stimulant such as caffeine prompts the heart to beat faster and the person to become more "wired". In turn, this leads to more rapid breathing and a potential increase in anxiety and stress. A couple of cups of coffee a day is not a big deal.

However, if you're knocking back the stuff by the pot-load and you're already more tense than a drug smuggler during a cavity search, then it may pay to ease up on the java.

Sorry to be a killjoy. I like a glass of wine as much as the next person (more, some would say), but alcohol is a depressant. It may make you feel better at the time, but it will not help you reduce long-term stress.

In fact, alcohol has the opposite effect - especially when you see photos on the company bulletin board of you dancing like a loon at the Christmas party while trying to drag Frank from HR into the stationery cupboard.

4. Eat a balanced diet

I'm a Life Coach, not a nutritionist. There are hundreds of good websites designed to help people adopt better eating habits, so I'll keep this short and sweet.

Keep all those saturated fats and processed and refined foods to a minimum. Drink plenty of water. Listen to your body when it tells you that you've had enough or that certain foods or food groups don't agree with you.

Look at the labels on food so that you know what you're eating. Be wise to what they really mean. Low fat may mean low fat, or it may mean slightly less fat than another product crammed full of fat. Low sodium may mean low sodium, or it may mean lower sodium than another product made of deep-fried raw salt and dipped in more salt.

Of course, we all know food companies never try to deceive customers intentionally; they just make innocent mistakes from time to time.

The point of eating healthily is simply that a healthy body can deal more efficiently with stress. The fitter and stronger you are, the more adept you will be when dealing with stressful incidents should they occur.

5. Exercise Regularly

Have you ever felt down or stressed after participating in a sport or working out? Of course not; it's almost physiologically impossible.

Exercise releases endorphins, oxygenates the blood and lowers stress. It also helps strengthen the immune system, improves energy levels, makes you feel better about yourself and helps you fit into that sexy little black number from way back when. Ladies, you can try exercise too, if you like.



I know it can seem tough getting back into the routine of exercise, especially if you haven't done any for a few years, but it really is worth it. If you hate working out alone, look for a team activity or work out with a friend or family member.

Were there any sports you liked as a kid that you could reintroduce into your life? If like me, you're a forty-something, don't let that stop you from having fun. Plenty of different leagues have sprung up over the last few years to cater to all sporting tastes and age-groups, including family and mixed sex leagues.

6. Breathe properly

If you are stressed out or worried sick about something, I can almost guarantee that your breathing and heart rate will be increased.

Too many people breathe shallowly, rapidly and from the upper chest area rather than from the diaphragm.

Check your breathing now. Where is it coming from? If it is your chest, then slow your breathing down and move it down as well. You should be breathing from your diaphragm, unless you are in the middle of a Pilates exercise class whilst reading this. If that is the case, put this e-book down immediately and concentrate on the job at hand.

Slow abdominal breathing immediately reduces stress levels. If you have breathed for years from high up in your chest, the sensation will feel weird, but then again, so did naked mud wrestling. Stick with it and breathing this way will soon become normal.

The next time you get that horrible feeling of stress, take a few deep, slow diaphragmatic breaths. Lengthen your exhale to about 50% longer than your inhale and take a metaphorical step back. Realize that you are in control of your self and what you think, if nothing else in life.

7. Laugh More

Do I really need to explain this? It's pretty much impossible to feel stressed if you are belly-laughing. Anxious people tend to lose the ability to see the funny side of life. Don't be one of them.



Laughter has been proven to reduce stress, aid recovery from illness and even improve our ability to withstand pain. Like exercise, the body releases endorphins when we laugh, and endorphins serve to make us feel better. Even if we fake a smile, we still receive some of the benefits because the connections between smiling and feeling good are hard-wired at a physical level.

If you're feeling stressed senseless, don't settle down for a quiet night with your tax returns, a Leonard Cohen CD and a bottle of cheap brandy. Watch some comedy, read a funny book or trawl YouTube for amusing videos of squirrels gnawing through electric cables.

Do anything to shift your state to feeling good about life again. As far as I'm aware, this life is the only one you have, so enjoy it.



8. Get Real

Question the importance of what stresses you out in the great scheme of things. Are you really likely to lose your job, all your money and your house? Is this situation just a storm in a teacup, a situation that you'll have forgotten about in a month's time, just like you've forgotten all the other temporary events you've weathered?

Even if the situation is something serious, so what? You've dealt with every other stressful situation you've encountered so far because you're still alive. Why not deal with this one?

Your ability to cope is infinitely better than you think it is. Start to trust in yourself and realize that the sky isn't falling. (At least, it isn't at the time of this writing.)

"I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened." - Mark Twain

9. Say, "Ahhh."

I'm not talking about the noise you make when your doctor asks you to stick your tongue out because of a nasty rash in your throat.

This "Ahhh" is the sound we make when we let out a huge sigh on contentment. Let out that sigh five or six times a day, either aloud (if you don't mind getting strange looks from colleges) or internally (if you'd prefer to retain a modicum of dignity).

This action sends a signal to the unconscious that all is well in your world. You'll immediately feel better. It may sound ridiculous, but it works. What are you waiting for?

10. Slow Down & Be In the Moment

If you remove sports from the mix, it would definitely be impossible not to benefit in many ways from moving through life more slowly and consciously. Slowing down means enjoying a pleasant meal, taking a walk, driving the car, and... well, there is one other enjoyable moment in life jumping to mind. But this book is G-rated.

Society tends to make us believe that we always need to be somewhere else, that we need to finish what we are doing as quickly as possible and move on.

We don't.

Sit down to eat lunch over a few days without worrying that you need to be doing other stuff. Slow down on the roads and see if you actually get to your destination any slower. Research has shown that driving aggressively in traffic seldom makes much of a difference - unless it's to your frazzled state of mind.



Even if you do save 30 seconds on your journey, what are you going to do with 30 seconds? You had that time all along; you were just in a different place.

Think about this: Is your day really planned down to the second? Have you ever been fired for being 40 seconds late? Have you ever missed a plane by 22 seconds? Have you ever had somebody divorce you for arriving 17 seconds late for a date? (Do you wish they had?)

Here's a secret: You only have this moment. The past is gone forever and the future may or may not arrive. If you spend every moment wishing you were in either one or the other, then you're going to miss the only reality that there is - the reality of now.

You can't be stressed when you're living in the moment. You stress yourself thinking about what might happen and what did happen, but you don't stress over what is happening. How crazy is that?

11. Relax Your Body

Relaxing is imperative and really comes from slowing down and being in the moment. Take time out for you to relax from time to time.

There are over 600 muscles in the human body. Although their natural state is to be at rest, people are so tense much of the time that the situation actually becomes the opposite: we train our bodies for tension.

Take the time to relax your face fully for a moment. Make yourself look like a total simpleton. Oh, go on. No one is looking. Even if they were, they'd be more likely to run away from you looking like that than to poke fun at you.



Start with the top of your head and move down, paying special attention to the muscles around the eyes, the mouth and in the jaw. Allow muscles to ease one by one. Feel how unusual your face now feels in a state of complete relaxation.

Tension feels natural to most people because they've been practicing being tense for most of their lives. It is a little bit like good posture; it feels weird to sit properly if we normally slouch (yes, I am guilty) because we are asking our body to do something it doesn't normally.

Of course, if we persevere at good posture, it will start to feel natural and we enjoy the health benefits. It's exactly the same with relaxation. Being relaxed will slowly start to feel better than being tense all the time. Relaxation helps maintain health, reduce stress and promote good sleep. If that isn't enough, relaxation helps you look younger too!

Have you ever heard anybody say that they have been to view the body of a friend or family member who has recently died and that they were amazed that they looked 10 years younger and so well? That's largely because the tension has drained from the body of the deceased and all the muscles are completely relaxed. I don't want you to wait until you are dead for people to be commenting on how well you look, so try relaxing now.

You don't have to opt for the half-wit look, actually. Just allow some of that neck and jaw tension to dissolve by consciously sending the right signals to your brain. You will immediately feel the benefit.



12. Relax Your Mind

There are a number of excellent ways to relax properly. I'm sorry to say that watching television isn't one of them.

I have no objection to the TV. In fact I love watching it. I like sports, especially soccer and football, I like to watch a good movie and I enjoy shows like House and 24. I am aware though, that television doesn't really help me fully relax.

Relaxation is something that we do, not something that just happens. It can be reading, walking, talking or even some sports. As long as we are fully engaged in the activity, then we relax at the same time.

TV rarely encourages full engagement and thus rarely helps the relaxation process.

I can offer you something brilliant at helping you to relax. It's absolutely free, too, and there are no ongoing costs or maintenance. It's also been proven to contribute to living longer, improving cognitive ability, reducing stress levels, promoting peace of mind and helping sleep patterns.

It is easy to do and has a cumulative beneficial effect with no negative side effects, other than maybe creating a deep desire to purchase a saffron robe and a pair of matching sandals. Yep, you've guessed it; it's meditation.

Meditation is so easy to explain that it makes a mockery out of the people that try to mystify it. Very simply, meditation is a concentrated form of focus.

That's it, really. You can spin that a few different ways if you want. You could say meditation is a trance state or that it's being in the moment or it's even refusing to think about the past or future. You'd be equally right no matter which definition you choose.

You can meditate lying down, sitting upright, standing up or even walking. As long as you are there in that very moment, you are meditating.

I often have people tell me they can't meditate. I tell them they must be dead, then, because if they can breathe, they can meditate. They tell me in return that they have a mind that never shuts up. Welcome to the human race!

I can offer you a guaranteed way to quiet your mind.

Concentrate on your breathing. Feel the breath coming in and the breath going out. Then concentrate on your body sensations, like your chest rising and falling.

Hey, presto! Your mind is way too busy to chatter and it has shut the **** up. Okay, your mind may only stay like that for a few moments or less, but the point is that it WAS quiet. Start over. Keep practicing every day for the next 40 years, and you'll have it cracked.



I know that 40 years seems like a long time, but whilst you're hanging around waiting to die, you have to do something, so why not this? When you practice, you will get better over time and the results will start to surprise you.

When I speak with clients about meditation, four out of five times the response is, "I don't have time." I have a stock answer to this and it is, "Yes, you do." It's that simple, honestly.

I don't care who you are. You have time to meditate if you want to do so. You don't need to allocate an hour out of your day, either. 10 minutes is better than nothing at all, and you can meditate pretty much anywhere or anytime you choose.

You may not choose to make time to meditate, but that's not the same as not having any time. You, my dear reader, have exactly the same 24 hours in a day as I do. You can watch the television playing reruns of reruns, listen to fear-inducing news segments or chill out with some meditation. The choice is yours, as always.

13. Do What You Love

I know it's a bit cliché, but who cares? Clients rarely tell me that they absolutely love their job. It does happen, but not that often. That's probably because people who passionately love what they do are less likely to seek the services of a Life Coach.



The average person spends over 80,000 hours at work during a lifetime. That's a lot of hours to do something that you don't enjoy doing. That's also a lot of hours spent feeling resentful and a lot of hours wasted just getting through the day to meet the next.

Find what you love to do and then look for ways to do it. Don't give up at the first hurdle because it seems tough; keep going. Look for people that have already done what you want to do and ask them how they did it.

I have had clients change careers in their 60s, so refuse to believe it is too late; just make it happen! I guarantee you'll be glad you did.

14. Chunk Down

Question: How do you eat an elephant?

Answer: One bite at a time.

I would say that over 80% of people who come to me for life coaching regularly feel overwhelmed. Other people whom I speak with socially often mention the same. It seems to me that along with procrastination and no-win, no-fee attorneys, feeling overwhelmed is the scourge of modern society.

The irony is that feeling overwhelmed can often lead to paralysis and procrastination when you want to be at your most productive.

Many people feel overwhelmed because they see the big picture of everything that needs to be done. They simply do not know where to begin.

That's quite some task you have on your plate. It would be easy to feel overwhelmed and buckle under the challenge. So what do you do?

If such an undertaking overwhelms you, here is why: Your first response would almost certainly be a mental image of a plane in your head, swiftly followed by a voice that says something like, "How the **** am I supposed to do THAT?! He's insane! I knew I shouldn't have poured mercury in his coffee. I can't do that; no way!"

You will get more agitated as you realize you're out of your league, and you either explode in an apoplectic fit of rage or you storm off in floods of tears.

On the other hand, if you're chilled with the task at hand because you've had a quiet week and you like a bit of a challenge, you'll have a whole different mental image and soundtrack playing inside your head.

You'll probably think, "Right. Well, I'm going to need some rivets," and you'll imagine yourself walking into the hardware store to buy 8 tons of rivets.

The difference between the two responses to the same situation is the ability to chunk the task down.

Chunking is the art of taking something that needs to be done and breaking it into easy-to-manage chunks. I accept that there are quite a lot of chunks involved in building a plane, but planes do get built, so somebody is chunking.

Let's imagine your boss made his request for you to build a plane and gave you a list that read something like this:

Please complete the following tasks in this order. Do not proceed to the next until the first task is complete.

1. Order 6 tons of rivets for delivery next week
2. Order 175 gallons of bright yellow paint
3. Ask Bob in Finance for a check for \$7.6 million dollars.
4. Call Frank at Rolls Royce and tell him you need four large engines
5. Send an e-mail to all employees asking if anybody knows how to fly a plane
6. Order 5,000 bags of mini-pretzels
7. Borrow a ladder from Maintenance
8. See if you can find a cockpit on eBay
9. Ask Maintenance if they can remove the door to my office and widen it by 100 feet or so
10. Buy a black box; any type of black box will do, as long as it's orange

You'd probably raise an eyebrow, but you'd get on your merry way, relaxed in the knowledge that your boss has mental issues and that you'll take over his job sometime soon regardless.

That's chunking down. It's taking a large task and breaking it into smaller tasks to make sure your focus remains on the individual task at hand. Nobody becomes overwhelmed at having to order rivets. The thought of a huge undertaking like building a plane is an altogether different matter.

If you're the type of person that never gets involved in large projects and is easily overwhelmed by having many tasks to do, try this:

Each night before bed and preferably before you sit down to unwind, write down five tasks that you really want to achieve - and can achieve - the following day. The tasks should be ones that will make you feel like your day went well.



Then underline the bottom of the page to indicate to yourself that the day is done in terms of work and it's time to chill.

Do not have more than five tasks on your list. We're trying to reduce stress, not freak you out with a list that looks like the Declaration of Independence.

Keep the list handy in case you remember something important that you need to add to it. If you do add a task, make sure you remove one from the bottom of the list too.



The following morning, start working on your list of tasks in order. Concentrate on the job at hand and trust that the other tasks will be there for you when you get to them.

If you don't complete a task, don't berate yourself. Simply add the unfinished task to the following day's list. No task should stay on the list for more than three or four days. If it does, ask yourself if the task needs postponing to a later date. Take the pressure off.

If the task must be done and you can't seem to get to it, do the following:

- Remove everything else from the list
- Make a promise to a loved one to complete the task
- Ask friends and colleagues to check in with you and see how you're progressing
- Always go easy on yourself; you're doing the best you can!

15. Mind Your Language

How big an impact does your day-to-day language have on your stress levels? I mean the words you use to converse with others and just as significantly, the words you use to talk to yourself.

If you had to rate the impact on a scale of importance from 1 to 100, with 1 meaning "no effect whatsoever" and 100 meaning "it's the only thing that has any influence", where would you score the impact?

Give it some thought, because I doubt you've ever asked yourself this question before. I don't want my opinions to influence you just yet.

Close your eyes at the end of the next paragraph and imagine the scene I'm about to describe. I'm drunk with power now that I have you thinking of a number, but humor me nonetheless.



You're at work on a Monday morning and a friend is speaking with you at the water cooler.

She says, "Jeez, this week looks tough. Tomorrow I'm having lunch with Judy because she's going through a real tough time with her pig of a husband. I really shouldn't go to lunch with her, though, because I'm so busy with that really important project that took over from the last important project, and it has to be finished before the next important project takes over.

On Wednesday, I have to visit my mom at lunchtime when I really need to go exchange those jeans I bought that don't look right. Then on Thursday, I have to be at the gym at 6.30am to lose two pounds because I've promised my trainer. On top of that, I need to get the flights and hotels booked for our vacation next year.

Don't even mention Friday to me, because it's a bloody nightmare. I have to take the dog to the vet for his booster shots, clean all the windows in the house, finish a pile of ironing, broker a Middle East peace initiative and be out of the house by 7.00pm because we're going to dinner with friends. Jeez, I'm gonna need my crack pipe by then, I can tell you!"

If you bothered to visualize this scene, my guess would be that you didn't see, hear or sense a happy woman.



The person would have sounded miserable. It's impossible to use language like that congruently and not sound unhappy. Not only that, but I can tell you without the need to ask what you were seeing that you most likely visualized a person with a slumped look about her shoulders and a fairly worn down, woe-is-me look on her face, like a bloodhound that's just been told Christmas has been canceled and it's all his fault.

What caused you to form that mental image was the language I used, because there wasn't anything else. Nothing has happened, so it wasn't the events in the story. Only the stories the person articulated caused the unhappy feelings.

A number of elements in that woman's monologue aren't at all helpful to her feelings, but I want to concentrate on what I feel is the most important aspect.

We refer to it in NLP as model operators of necessity. These are words and phrases like "must," "need," "should" and "have to."

In and of themselves model operators of necessity aren't really a problem. In fact, we need them from time to time (pun intended). They only become an issue when we use them improperly - and more importantly, incessantly.

"Oh, come on, Tim!" I hear you wail. "They're only little words." Yeah right, and that's only a little rash, so you may as well ignore that too.

So what exactly is the problem with model operators of necessity? Why are they such an issue when used inappropriately?

If you say you have to do something, then you're giving yourself no other option. That may not be a bad thing, you might think; after all, we need to breathe, we need to work and we need to tell everybody to hire a life coach, preferably one named Tim.

However, when we use those expressions to describe things that really aren't needed, don't have to be done and aren't necessities, we place an undue amount of pressure on ourselves. We start to feel agitated, like we're backed into a corner with no way out.

This trapped feeling causes one of two effects:

- You do what you say you have to do and feel like crap about it.
- You don't do what you say you're going to do and also feel crap about it.

That is what I call a lose-lose, situation.

Wait, it can get worse. It's possible to achieve a triple lose-lose-lose if you buckle down and work hard enough.

If you're constantly telling yourself that you need to lose weight, must quit smoking, should join a gym and you don't comply with any of that, what do you think the effect on your self-esteem will be over time? Not good, let me tell you, because each time you fail to follow through, you break a contract with yourself.

What effect does low self-esteem have on your ability to handle stress? Correct. It shreds it, burns it and then scatters the ashes to the four winds.

You'll probably still persist in using the same language as you always have, though, because doing so feels right - and you still fail to understand why you feel so bad and why you never follow through with your good intentions.

You can change all that by changing your language.

Start by recognizing if you're one of the vast majority of people doing this (in my experience). Simply check in with your language use from time to time. Most of this stuff goes on in the background. It's like the noise of an air-conditioner; after a while, you tune the noise out and don't seem to hear it anymore.

By being mindful, you can become more conscious and aware of your thoughts.

If you check in with yourself and feel that you are too restrictive with your language, there are two options for change:

First, you can change your words to ones that elicit a flat response. Instead of saying, "I need to do that," say, "I'm going to do that." Instead of saying, "I must do that," say "I will do that."

These simple statements of fact don't really have a negative or positive effect on our physiology or psychology. They don't make us slump our shoulders or grimace. We just accept that something will happen.



When we use these types of words and phrases, we instantly feel better. The mind associates these phrases with something enjoyable and not with onerous tasks.

Clients occasionally tell me that I'm unrealistic when I suggest this change for negative situations. I usually have to stifle the urge to roll my eyes very unprofessionally. Don't get me started on reality because I'll be here all day.

I will say this, though: You make your own reality. Reality is completely subjective. If you don't believe me, I don't even care because in my reality, you do!

If reality is completely subjective, why not use every tool at your disposal to make your reality a brilliant one? I never fail to be amazed by people that insist they can't do something rather than looking for reasons why they can.

Try saying, "I want to go to the gym," or, "I'd like to babysit for the lunatic kid next door," or even, "I'd really love to buy Tim's critically acclaimed and reasonable priced book, [Don't Ask Stupid Questions - There Are No Stupid Questions](#)"

See what effect that type of language has on you. It may well feel weird to start with, but so did swimming in whipped cream with electric eels. Persist and eventually you'll feel better about what you want to get done.

The cool part is that you'll even start to fool your unconscious into believing it's true.

16. Know your values.

Knowing your values is, in my opinion, the most important element because it cuts through symptoms and gets straight to what can often be the cause of chronic stress. You could very well be stressed because you aren't living in accordance with your own values.

If you don't know your values, you don't know yourself. If you don't know yourself, then it's difficult to understand why you feel the way you do.



Find out what is important to you at the core of yourself, and try to make sure that you satisfy those needs as much as you can.

I wrote an entire e-book on beliefs and values called, [Know Yourself - Change Yourself](#). You should check it out if you haven't already done so, because beliefs and values dictate the quality of your life. The e-book also explains the mechanics of visualization and gives you some cool tips on changing negative behaviors.

It's not an overnight fix. You have trained yourself to think as you do over many years. It takes some commitment to reprogram and begin to feel more relaxed about life.

A client came to see me once, wanting help with managing chronic and debilitating stress. The initial conversation went something like this:

Me: What are you prepared to do to reduce your stress levels?

Client: Whatever you suggest.

M: Ok, we'll start by reducing the hours you work.

Client: Oh I couldn't possibly do that; I have a lot of important projects on the go.

Me: Right. Well, let's look at reducing your alcohol intake.

Client: I'd rather not; a glass of wine with meals really helps me relax.

Me: Well, let's cut down on caffeine then.

Client: Are you mad? I need coffee to kick-start my day.

Me: How about joining a gym?

Client: Sorry. I'm too busy to do THAT!

Me: Well, what are you prepared to do then?

Client: Anything you want; just name it.

You probably can't have a completely stress-free life and it's doubtful you'd even want one if you could. However, you certainly can manage or harness stress if the will and desire is there.

Remember that stress is always a choice. If you can remember that when stressful situations rear their ugly head, then you'll always realize that you have alternative responses available.

If you have enjoyed this e-book, get yourself over to [The Discomfort Zone](#) and subscribe free of charge for more of the same great advice.

If you're now thinking, "Wow, I have to hire this guy! I'm sure he can help me clean the garage out, if nothing else," then you can contact me by calling 407-334-4692 or by [clicking here](#).

Thanks for reading! Now go chill for a while.

Tim
[A Daring Adventure](#)



Here's more gratuitous self-promotion that you've already read, but hey, it has to be worth a go:

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