

Wroten & Associates

January 2013 Leadership Insight

Managing Stress in the New Year

"Stress is the trash of modern life - we all generate it, but if you don't dispose of it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life." --Danzae Pace

Christmas is over and the New Year has arrived. The stress of the holidays has mostly passed, which means we return to our regular routines and schedules, managing our lives day-to-day and the changes that may come with the New Year. The beginning of the New Year is a great time to think about what we can do to reduce or relieve our stress. If you are like most people, chances are you will try to do too much, over schedule, and have difficulty saying no to requests from others.

We all experience stress in different degrees depending on the circumstances. Too much stress can take a toll on our health and emotional well being. Managing stress is about taking charge of your emotions, thoughts, schedules and the way in which you handle problems. So what can we do to manage our stress? There are numerous stress management techniques that have been shown to have a positive effect on reducing stress. Let's examine a few of these key techniques.

Breathing exercises provide a simple, convenient way to relieve stress and can be used anytime, anywhere. Simply take slow deep breaths, hold them for a few seconds and then exhale slowly. **Learn to say no** to other people and don't take on more than you can handle. When you become frustrated doing a task, **take a break** and come back to it when your frustration has subsided. **Guided imagery** is a helpful technique for coping with difficult situations. Imagine a time, place or person that makes you feel peaceful, relaxed and happy and one that you have an emotional connection. Bear in mind that at first guided imagery may feel awkward, but with practice it will get easier.

Take care of yourself, because if you become burned out or totally overwhelmed you have nothing left to give others. **Focusing on prioritizing** your tasks and goals will minimize your stress because you will have a plan which you can follow. Incorporating physical **exercise** three to five times a week is also a great stress reliever. Look for, and accept **support and feedback** from your friends, colleagues and family members. Have a **sense of humor**, many studies have shown that the physical act of **laughing** releases tension and brings positive physiological changes. And finally, have a positive **attitude**. Having a positive outlook transforms challenges into opportunities. If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. By changing your expectations and attitude about a stressful situation you gain a sense of control.

Remember you are not alone! We all have some level of stress, good and bad. However, it is how we handle ourselves when we are in a stressful situation that is important. By identifying stress relievers ahead of time you will be better prepared to manage the challenging situations that come your way.

Wishing you a Happy New Year and a less stressful month!

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