

KEEP YOUR



PING COOL

Stress Management Techniques to Stay Calm and Boost Your Effectiveness

By Sandra Bienkowski

The success or failure of an entire event falls on your shoulders. No pressure, right? Even if you are more resilient than most, the stress of regular life combined with the massive details of planning and executing an event can be challenging. Sure, you could escape to a spa, find your Zen with a walk in the woods or do some deep breathing, but other stress management techniques may be best so you can personify calm under pressure on the job.

WORK YOUR STRENGTHS. You live by Winston Churchill's quote: "Failing to plan, is planning to fail." But do you plan for how you work? Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and knowing what yours are can help you work more effectively and manage your stress level. Maybe you are great with people, but you aren't the best person to do a detailed review of a contract. Marcus Buckingham, author of *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*, says the luckiest people get to say every day, "Today I had the opportunity to do what I do best." Figure out what your strengths are, put them to work and don't worry about your weaknesses—delegate them.

"People feel they need to be well-rounded because society gives us that message from the time we're schoolchildren. Instead, we need to shift our focus and ask, 'What's working well and how can I get more of that?'" Buckingham said.

When you maximize your strengths at work, you'll feel "in the zone." You won't be stressed about being weak in a specific area because you will be self-aware enough to proactively delegate.

MAKE SURE YOU AREN'T SPINNING YOUR WHEELS. There's an expression that the biggest stress is work left undone. Unfinished work is mentally taxing and just plain stressful. Instead of getting overwhelmed and trying to cross off dozens of little things all at once—a natural human tendency—eat the big frog first. Brian Tracy, author of *Eat That Frog!* says, "If the first thing you do each morning is to eat a live frog, you can go through the day with the satisfaction of knowing that is the probably the worst thing that is going to happen to you all day long."

What's your frog, you ask? It's the biggest, most important task and the one with which you are most likely to procrastinate

if you don't do something about it now.

"It's also the one task that can have the greatest positive impact on your life and results at that moment," Tracy said.

So, make sure you are productive and not just active. We often fool ourselves when we think being busy means being productive. It's a form of procrastination to make yourself busy with little things while you knowingly don't make progress on the most important things. Eat that frog early in the day and watch your productivity soar.

EXERCISE IN THE A.M. OK, maybe this is a tip you've heard before, but it's too important to skip. According to Chris Freytag, a fitness trainer and *Prevention* magazine contributor, exercise helps dispel stress hormones and stimulates the release of endorphins that gives you a feeling of well-being. Also, you can burn off tension as you exercise and gain mental clarity.

Commit to working out in the morning. People who work out first thing in the day tend to make it happen because their day doesn't get in the way. If you save your workout for later, later may never happen. Plus, it's better to get your energy and mood boost in the morning so you can use it all day.

MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS. Here's where you have to ditch your perfectionism, no matter how much you think it serves you. Glitches will happen. Just knowing and accepting that some things won't go your way can alleviate a tremendous amount of pressure and stress. Imagine if you fell apart at the slightest variance from your plan? Control all the variables you can, but once your event is in motion, don't set yourself up for disappointment with hopes that everything will unfold with precision. A little wiggle room for mistakes—and being confident that you can manage what happens—will keep your stress level in check. Prepare for all eventualities to eliminate unnecessary headaches and have contingency plans...just don't expect everyone to whom you delegate will deliver exactly as promised. It's OK.

IDENTIFY WHAT RECHARGES YOU. You won't be effective running an event if you are running on empty. In addition to that seven hours of sleep most experts recommend, take time to recharge weekly. Some people recharge with solo activities like reading a good book, writing in a journal, going for a jog or just sitting outside to get some sunshine and fresh air. Others need to burn off steam and refuel by being around a lot of people, enjoying a night out with friends or an activity with the whole family. Consciously make time to recharge. Figure out if you will be more recharged with introverted or extroverted activities, and get it on your schedule.

PICTURE FLAWLESS EXECUTION. Worrying about what may go wrong is often one of the greatest stressors for event planners. Invariably, something is bound to go wrong. It's good to know that, but focus on flawless execution anyway. Review your event in your mind going exactly the way you envision. Visualization is a powerful technique, says John Assaraf, brain training expert and author of *The Answer*.

"Thoughts create everything," Assaraf said. "But here's the problem: Most people spend their time thinking about what they don't want, and wondering why it shows up over and over again."



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the end of the day or week (depending on your preference), you may be surprised to find that many of your worries never came to pass. Worry is thought to be one of the most useless emotions because it doesn't change anything; it only makes you feel bad. The worry box can be beneficial because you will soon discover what you don't need to worry about. Each time you manage a new event, hopefully you can let go a new worry.

PICTURE A WATERFALL. You may laugh until you try it. Jack Canfield, author of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series, says a great way to mitigate stress is to picture yourself inside a waterfall, where everything negative can't get to you because it washes right off of you. Picturing the waterfall will begin to relax you, and when someone says something that would normally stress you out, you can use this technique to let the comment dissipate into your waterfall. Serenity now!

It may be difficult to tell an event planner that he or she can't control everything—but no one can, regardless of talent. Aspire to control the controllable. Let go of the rest and you'll let go of a lot of stress and gain the mental clarity to be at your best. **one+**

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Visualize your event being a success in order to make it happen.

"In a very real, concrete sense, your beliefs don't simply reflect your reality, they create your reality," Assaraf said. "While it all starts with an idea and a crystal-clear picture of what you want, you can't just sit around visualizing and waiting for things to happen. It takes work putting that vision into action."

HOW DO YOU TALK TO YOURSELF? You may think it sounds a little out there, like you have to repeat positive mantras or affirmations, but it's actually one of the most important things you can do each day to manage your stress. What is the running dialogue in your head? Do you amp up your stress level by focusing on what's not going right or by not being self-confident? Or do you stay calm by telling yourself you can handle whatever comes your way? What you think determines how you feel. Plus, where you put your mind determines your focus. Zero in on what might go wrong and you may just manifest it. Focus on what will go right and believe in yourself and your ability to succeed.

MAKE A WORRY BOX. According to researchers at Harvard Medical School, "everyone gets distracted by worries and concerns, but sometimes worries can spill over, seeping into the fabric of your day. Having a place to contain your worries—quite literally—may help you set them aside." The researchers recommend finding a box and jotting down your worries on Post-it notes or slips of paper. Dropping those notes into the box will allow you to mentally let go of your worries—at least for the day. When you decide to open the box at



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