

Workplace Wellness



Conquering Stress at the Office

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Feeling stressed and too busy at work? Managing stress during “normal” times was one thing, but now with COVID-19, everything at the office (and at home) seems more overpowering. Stressors are everywhere you turn, from following proper infection control guidelines to dealing with overwhelmed and maybe even confrontational clients and co-workers. It may feel that the world is falling down around you, yet you must put on an, “everything is fine” face for your clients. Your stress level is rising. Let’s look at how to decrease it.

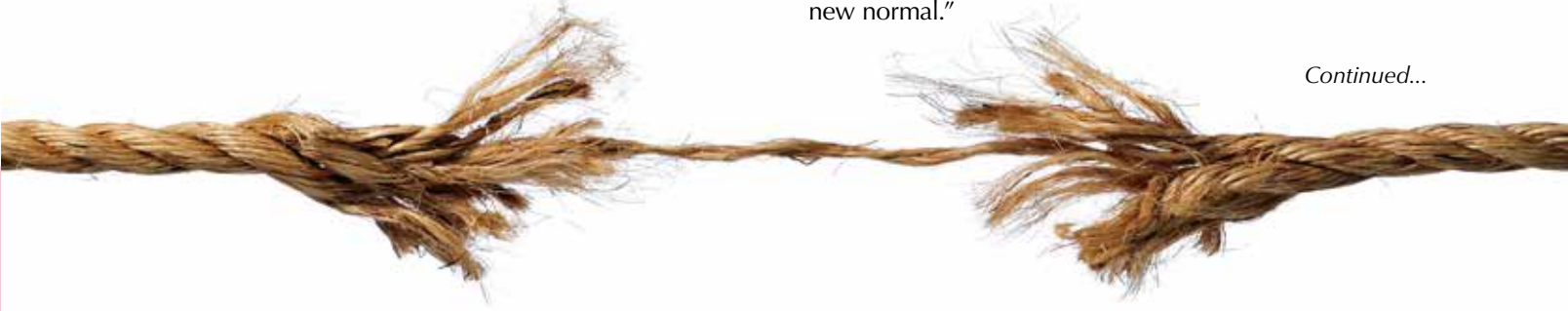
There is a lot of confusion around stress. As a result, the stress-less methods you’ve perhaps been trying don’t work, and your stress continues to increase. Let me clarify some points about stress right now so you can start to decrease stress, feel calm and composed, and perform more efficiently.

1. **You don’t need to cope with stress or manage it, you need to conquer it.** Stress is something you rise above or rise out of. It takes work. It takes commitment. But it is the most meaningful, satisfying, and fulfilling work you will ever do. It is the work of your lifetime. When you work at conquering stress, you grow as a human being. You grow in character and virtue. You become a better dental hygienist, a better co-worker, a better spouse, a better parent, a better person.
2. **Stress is internal disharmony and chaos.** Stress is the result of your negative emotional response to your perception of your life situation. Your life situation is the stressor, your challenge, your opportunity to grow. Stress is only present when you internally respond to the stressor with an unregulated negative emotion such as irritation, impatience, and anger. These

negative emotions create stress or physiological chaos (scientifically known as incoherence). The physiological effects of stress cause the brain to go “offline” and operate “out of sync,” which explains why brain activities such as decision making, planning, creative thinking, problem solving, communication, self-regulation, and concentration are impaired when you’re stressed. You do things you regret; say things you don’t mean. You become “not you” and can get stuck in a downward spiral of stress and negativity.

3. **Stress is a choice.** Your emotions are under your control. It may not always feel that way, but they are. In fact, your emotions are one of the few things in life over which you have ultimate control. When you let negative emotions such as anxiety, insecurity, anger, and frustration dominate, you are choosing to experience stress.
4. **Stress is a habit.** The more you practise doing something, the easier it gets. Then sooner or later, you’re doing it without thinking. It becomes a habit. Stress is no different. When you continuously choose to experience a negative emotion such as fear, overwhelm, and depression, you are choosing to experience stress, over and over again. You begin to make that choice without even thinking about it. Stress, then, becomes a habit. The good news: habits can be broken and reformed. You only have to consciously choose, over and over, to experience renewing and heartfelt emotions such as appreciation, compassion, care, and love. With repeated practice (and a little heartfelt patience with yourself), harmony becomes your new habit. And you will start choosing to experience renewing emotions without even thinking about it! Responding to challenges in life with renewing emotion will become your “default” or “new normal.”

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When you recognize and acknowledge that you are experiencing a negative emotion such as anger, depression, frustration, emotional hurt or overwhelm, immediately use this Emotional First Aid technique:

1. **Stop:** Choose to stop that feeling in its tracks. Choose to stop letting the situation dictate how you feel. *This empowers you.*
2. **Drop:** Drop your focus to your heart. Let your breathing slow down as you imagine inhaling deep gentle breaths in through your heart and then exhaling, releasing until you find a natural rhythm vthat feels good. *This makes you more coherent.*
3. **Roll:** Decide to roll with life. Choose a more appropriate and more effective emotion for the situation and firmly remind yourself to feel that way. *This makes you feel, do, and be better.* Keep this renewing emotion going for as long as you can and as often as you can. It will help you get through the situation and will prepare you for the next one.

When you find yourself experiencing stress, remember, the situation only controls your emotions if you let it. As difficult as it may seem, taking responsibility for your emotions is the most empowering decision you will make. It is critical to your success in conquering stress at the office.