

Defeating Stress - - - Quick Guide

Maintaining Self-Esteem and Motivation for the Job Search

Stress is a nearly constant companion to everyone on the job search. Every environment provides for the possibility of encountering stress. Most people utilize a modest amount of stress to their advantage, or adapt to its effects one way or another so that they are no longer consciously aware of it. Some curl up with a good book; others enjoy knitting, cooking or woodwork; still others relax while participating in a sport or a hobby.

However, when one finds life turned topsy-turvy because of a crisis such as a termination of employment, usual coping strategies can be less effective. Job loss is one of those experiences that can play havoc with emotions and feelings of self-worth.

The negative effects of stress become more acutely evident and can affect both motivation and self-esteem.

Stress is difficult to define, but we know it when we encounter it. Stress can express itself in the elevated blood pressure, hyper-tense muscles, altered hormone secretions, and generally in a tense, harried feeling.

Learning and practising stress-reducing techniques can bring significant reductions in these and other potential reactions such as preoccupation of thoughts, sleepless nights, impatience, tactlessness, procrastination, seclusion, irritability, depression and anxiety.

Comparable reactions have been described as "**fight, fright or flight**" because they correspond to the responses of animals which, when confronted by a threatening situation, prepare to do battle, freeze or run away. Our problem as people, though, is that both our world and we are so much more complex.

SOME COMMON STRESS GENERATING TRIGGERS

WORRY	about the future, finances and job possibilities. Worry can be perceived as a vote of non-confidence. It may be learned behaviour or an attempt to show love and caring.
REGRET	about the past and a focus on negative events. "If only." "I should have." Take from the past only what is useful for the present.
PROCRASTINATION	that prevents active, forward movement. Embrace a "Do it now" perspective.
HIGH STANDARDS	View setbacks as objective feedback.
BLAMING	that always holds others responsible, is counter-productive and lessens the opportunity for progress.
GUILT	accentuating what 'should have been' rather than what 'will be' done. The fastest way to engender a feeling of guilt is to use the words "should, why or but". Better to substitute action words as: "I'm going to", "I've decided to", or "I will".
EXCESSIVE PLEASING	Continually trying to please others at your own expense can damage relationships and lead to resentment or early burnout.
COMPARISONS	to what others have or do not have. When you compare yourself to others who are less fortunate, you tend to focus on negatives. If you compare yourself to those more successful, you tend to feel inferior and discouraged. Appreciate what you embrace as valued; focus on what counts - - - your own successes, instead of unproductive comparisons.

Job loss and the subsequent process of search and relocation, although stress inducing, can eventually enhance one's ability to deal with personal struggles in life and at work. Thus, what begins as trauma can become an opportunity to re-examine, re-evaluate and readjust many aspects of life.

Through the entire process of searching for new employment, individuals can learn to react to stress positively to combat exhaustion. Generally speaking, physical, mental, social, financial, and spiritual fitness have been shown to be valuable inhibitors of stress.

Chronic stress response tends to develop wherein the inner experience of tension (e.g. tense muscles) serves as a subliminal cue signifying further threat.

Simply put, stress begets stress, and the cycle continues leading to increased vulnerability and potentially greater physical, emotional and interpersonal problems. Many individuals even call their own identity or their purpose for existing into question. As extreme as this might seem, it is not an uncommon reaction to severe stress.

Short-term stressful effects of termination, career decisions, self-analysis and the actual job search need to be well managed in order to reduce anxieties and maintain self-esteem and motivation. It is important to integrate stress-reducing techniques with productive tasks into a sound search program. Below are two easily practised yet uncomplicated stress reduction activities that have been successfully utilized.



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Combating excessive stress is essential in order to maintain stability while searching for a job. One needs to develop the ability to implement a response that is incompatible with stress, i.e., **the relaxation response**. There are just a few elements necessary to proceed toward positive results:

- a quiet environment
- a receptive attitude
- a comfortable position

The two most readily accessible ways to attain the benefits of the relaxation response are:

PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES A SIMPLE FORM OF MEDITATION

MEDITATION

1. Find a quiet environment. 2. Sit comfortably. 3. Close your eyes. 4. Relax your muscles.
5. Inhale deeply through your nose (until your lungs are filled) while thinking the word "one". As you breathe out slowly, quietly whisper the word "two" until all air is released from the lungs.
6. Continue for about 10 minutes. (Don't be concerned when your thoughts lead you away. This is to be expected. Simply return to the breathing routine.)

PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

Get into a comfortable position. Be sure that your neck, legs, and arms are supported and ensure that no muscle groups are in opposition.

Take 10 deep, comfortable breaths (as above).

Start by focusing on your feet. Close your eyes; take a slow deep breath through your nose, all the while tensing up your feet. Concentrate on the tension residing there. As you slowly release your breath through your mouth (as if cooling a hot bowl of soup) begin to release the tension in your feet.

Repeat this procedure for sequential groups of muscles moving up to:

calves	stomach	arms	shoulders	head
thighs	chest	lower back	neck	scalp
buttocks	hands	upper back	face	

When the whole body is more relaxed, you can continue with more relaxed breathing for about five minutes.

SUMMARY

- Don't expect immediate results.
- Experiment to find a method that is best for you.
- A massage may also be good for relaxation.
- Practise these techniques for 10 to 20 minutes, twice a day.
- Implement other activities to complement relaxation techniques. Discuss ongoing concerns with your counsellor.
- Following the advice of your doctor, select an exercise and nutritional regime that will increase your stamina.
- You will need energy for endurance. If eating, smoking, drinking or any other of life's "small pleasures" have become excessive or detrimental, follow a plan to cut back. You need a clear mind for phone calls, interviews, research and communicating. Your family doctor may have additional suggestions if the difficulties are entrenched and persistent.
- Seek out support from community groups or service clubs for fellowship, sharing, purpose or direction . . . and you are given an opportunity to help others.
- Keep up the search, no matter how great the challenge seems. The best relief from the stress of job relocation or career transition will always be finding a good job fit.
- Stress management techniques take relatively little time and can result in a greater sense of well being, as well as improved ability to cope with the tasks of living, and even lowered blood pressure. Job searching will also be easier.

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