

Twelve Strategies To

Reduce Stress

&

Gain More Energy

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Introduction



Working all day can be draining. Take for example a customer service representative who doesn't know what the next question will be, or the mood of the next customer, or whether the organization will be able to satisfy the customer's need. Answering telephones, responding to queries, finding solutions to problems, and keeping people satisfied can be rewarding but also challenging. When we are at it all day long, week in and week out we can become stressed out. Consider the following twelve energizing strategies as a way to meet the challenge.

These re-energizing strategies are not difficult, they just take a bit of self-discipline and that just might be the hard part.

You see these strategies relate to changing our habits and changing habits is not always easy. Those of us who have changed habits know how difficult it is. It can take up to three weeks of consistent practice to change a habit, that is why I have included only twelve strategies for managing yourself on the front line.

Try one of the strategies each month and find out the difference in your outlook on life, the strength of your body, the calmness of your mind, and the wholeness of your spirit.

Strategy #1: Set Achievable Personal and Work Goals

When people set goals conventional research shows that they live longer. However, if we are to achieve these goals, we should write them out in a way that shows action and measurement. Action means we will do something to make it happen. Measurement allows us to track progress along the way. Be SMART, when you write them, be: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Trackable. If goals are not SMART they usually will fall into the category of a wish list.

Let's take a couple of examples.: At work you can write something like, "Complete the policy on the wellness program." A laudable goal, but not fully measurable or trackable. There is no timeline for completion, so you can say, "I'll get to it someday." And, behold it will be completed sometime. Maybe! A great incentive to procrastinate, don't you think?

If your goal is relevant to your work, you should ask: "How does it relate to my work? What priority does it have?" And if it isn't relevant then ask, "Why am I doing it?" If it is relevant then ask, "How important is it? Is it necessary and urgent? Is it urgent and necessary? Is it necessary but not urgent? Or, is it urgent but not necessary at all?"

Once you have answered these questions you can write a SMART goal such as: "I will complete a draft policy statement on wellness and present it to management for approval by September 30, 20XX."

Then you can break it down into achievable monthly tasks, such as:

- ♦ Complete the research for the wellness policy by February 8.
- ♦ Ask for input from colleagues and receive their comments by March 31.
- ♦ Write the first draft by May 31.
- ♦ Circulate to colleagues for first review and receive their comments by June 31.
- ♦ Make adjustments to the policy statement by July 31.
- ♦ Circulate the final draft to colleagues and receive their comments, by August 20.
- ♦ Prepare a draft policy statement for approval by September 20, 20XX.

We can use the same goal setting strategy for our personal life as well. Rather than saying "I'm going to lose weight this year," be more specific and write down; "I'm going to lose 30 pounds/kilos by June 31, 20XX.. Then set out the tasks to achieve that goal.

When we know where we are going, ambiguity is reduced, progress can be measured, and our comfort level is heightened. In the end our stress level is reduced. This month focus on writing five to eight SMART goals that you can action.



Strategy #2: Accept The Givens

Often our anxiety level increases because we worry about things outside of our control. Worry doesn't accomplish anything except personal grief, and often grief for others. Here are a few for instances: we can't control time, but we can control what we do with it; we can't control the weather, but we can control how we plan for poor weather; we can't control how people will relate to us, but we can control how we relate to others. **We will have less anxiety if we control those things that are in our control and accept those things that are outside of our control. This month focus on controlling only those things in your control.**



Strategy #3: Take Energy Breaks



One of the hard lessons busy people learn is that their energy drains when they don't fuel up. They skip meals or skimp on meals, gobble down food while working the phone or their computer and eat junk food rather than nutritious meals. I knew all about eating well but I didn't follow my own advice. The result - quadruple heart by-pass surgery and that wasn't pretty for me or my family.

Busy people also learn that when they are at their computer long hours without ergonomic seating or when the monitor is too close, they experience strain and pain from their eyes, backs, shoulders and wrists.

Take heed when these things happen your body is yelling out, **"Take a break!"**

Try these suggestions this month:

- Work in 90-minute sprints and take a five or ten-minute break. In some instances work in fifteen and thirty-minute sprints and take a couple of minutes out.
- When at your desk too long: stand up and stretch; take a short walk down the hall; shift your eyes from the computer to something else; move away from your desk; take a walk during the noon hour.
- Eat properly and pay attention to the green, yellow, orange vegetables. Slow down on the breads and leave the sweets alone (a real difficulty for me). Instead, eat fruits - any kind and all kinds.
- Slow the mind down. Take five deep breaths, reduce the mind traffic and after three minutes come back to work.

Strategy #4: Exercise Regularly

Our body is built to move, so move it regularly. We can be quite sedentary on the front line. Often, we are either standing or sitting for long periods. Overtime this takes its toll on our body and we find fat rolls creeping around our waist, back-end, and other places too numerous to mention. The antidote to this is exercise.

Get up from your chair and walk around, take a ten-minute walk in the morning, over the noon hour and in the evening. Find a buddy and go for a run. Take the stairs. If sitting, stand up and read or walk about while you read. Join a gym, seek a lifestyle coach or trainer. Do something, just don't sit and stand for hours on end. One more thing, reduce the time you spend watching television, reading on your tablet and text messaging. Get off the couch and do yard work or clean out the garage. **Do one or two of these activities daily and you will find you have more energy. Make a commitment to exercise this month.**



Strategy #5: Drink Plenty Of Fluids



Walk through any office or observe a reception area and you will find beverages in hand or on the desk - and often not the right kind of beverage. We see soda drinks with high sugar content, lattes with high fat content, or a coffee with high caffeine content.

What's wrong with this picture? It's true our bodies need fluids, but they need the right kind of fluids. Too much of the wrong kind clog the arteries, add an inch or more to the waste and make us jittery. The health hazards are well known - well ok, maybe not so for coffee, but more than four cups of the stuff can take its toll.

Water should be on top of our fluid list. An average adult body is 57%-60% water and it follows that a lack of water drains our energy and leads to dehydration. Nearly all systems in our body depend on water. Water moistens tissues such as those in the eyes, mouth and nose, regulates body temperature, lubricates joints, helps prevent constipation, lessens the strain on the kidneys and liver and carries nutrients and oxygen to cells. Drinking water after waking helps activate internal organs, one glass before meals helps digestion, and one glass before bedtime helps reduce strokes and heart attacks.

Review your water intake this month and make sure water is a major part of your fluid diet.

Strategy # 6: Think Positively



Thinking positively means approaching challenges with a positive outlook. It doesn't necessarily mean avoiding things that make us feel uncomfortable or ignoring negative situations. Instead, it means approaching those situations in a positive light, or making the best of a bad situation. We can improve our ability to think positively by affirming or actuating the positive for ourselves and others. Rather than thinking "I can't do this," say, "I can do this!" Rather than thinking, "I can't get along with this person," think about the positive aspects of the person and affirm those within your mind's eye; rather than thinking, "This place is a lousy place to work," think about, "What I can do to make it a better place to work." Thinking positively is not Pollyanna, pie in the sky thinking. It is thinking that is realistic but tempered with a positive approach to life rather than a negative one.

Thinking positively works. According to the **Mayo Clinic**, **positive thinking** can lead to a longer life span, less stress, lower rates of depression, increased resistance to the common cold, better coping skills, lower risk of cardiovascular disease, increased physical wellbeing and overall better psychological health.

If your approach to life is more on the negative side, and you would like to change it take heart because positive thinking can be learned. In essence you are learning a new habit and as is the case of any change in habit you will need to develop habit changing strategies. In this case,

- Identify what needs to change, name it and make a firm commitment to replace it with something positive;
- Throughout the day take a time out and review how you are moving towards greater optimism;
- Whenever you find yourself becoming negative, take pause and rephrase your thinking or how you are verbalizing your thoughts;
- Start the day with an affirmation or positive thought and reinforce it by verbalizing the thought throughout the day; and,
- Surround yourself with positive people.

Make this habit changing strategy a goal for this month.

Strategy #7: Reward Yourself

We get paid for our work. That's not a reward but something we receive in return for doing good work. A reward is something we receive for going beyond the ordinary and sometimes just completing the ordinary in an extraordinary fashion. Often, we don't expect anything more for this work, except the satisfaction of knowing that we have done a good job. This is more about self-satisfaction than self-aggrandizement. Sometimes successful companies take note of this and highlight individuals as role models and identify them as potential people they would like to promote.



This is not always the case, however, nor should we expect the company to always take note. Sometimes we know we have done a good job, but no one notices so it may be time to reward ourselves. We don't need to be extravagant about it. We just need to take time to pat ourselves on the back. Do something simple: take a five-minute break; treat yourself with something special over the noon hour; or be kind to someone, perhaps give them that special treat you were thinking for yourself. **Set a goal this month to do specific kind acts - a kind act always gets rewarded.**

Strategy #8: Get Enough Sleep

Getting enough sleep is something many of us have a modicum of control over but often don't follow appropriate sleep protocol. We can easily fall into bad habits prior to bedtime like watching the late show or a heart thumping drama on television, reading on tablets or on our phones, drinking an alcohol or coffee beverage, entering into a heated debate, or not closing off our day. We have control over all of these items but once again it comes down to self-discipline. If you find yourself in any one of these situations here are some habit changes you can make:



- Thirty minutes to one hour before bedtime, switch off the television, put your reading tablet and telephone away;
- Drink a cup of warm water or milk and avoid heated exchanges;
- Plan your next day and complete any quick activities left on your today list;
- Review unfinished business and set a date and time when you plan on completing them;
- Identify your priorities for the next day and plan on completing at least one first thing in the morning.

Sleep deprivation is one of the most productivity wasters in the workplace today and one of the most unhealthy habits people have. This month review your sleep habits and make specific changes for a healthier sleep.

Strategy #9: Avoid The Some-Day Stack

The 'Some-Day Stack' is that pile of stuff you put off for another time, day or week. You know, the things you pile on your 'hard desk' – the one on which your computer sits – or your 'soft desk' – the one on which your emails, Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint sit, or both. Eventually these stacks will stress you out. **This month review your someday stacks and get rid of them.**

There is an old axiom, "pick it up and decide what you are going to do with it before you put it down," and I suggest that we can now add "read it on your monitor and decide what you are going to do with it before going on to the next item". The process is quite simple. Just decide to do it, delegate it to someone else, set a time when you can do it, or trash it. If the item is important, set a priority to do it now or when you can do it; if it's not important and not urgent file it or trash it. If you are in a position where you have the opportunity to delegate consider that option, if you are not, then consider the other four strategies. Remember the process is simple but it takes discipline. And that my friend rests with you.



Strategy #10: Claim The Importance Of Your Work



Whatever you do is important no matter what position you hold. Someone is dependent on you fulfilling your responsibilities. If it wasn't important then you wouldn't have a position. You would be out of work. When you signed up with a company no doubt you signed up with the intention to carry out your work with the best of your ability. This is something expected by both you and your employer. The best way to align yourself with your work is to ensure what you do is *connected with your personal purpose and values*. This raises your work to a higher purpose and adds value to you and your employer. A quote attributed to Steve Jobs reads, "The only way to do great work is to love what you do." I suggest this means that we are not in it just for the paycheck. If the paycheck is the only thing that counts then sooner or later you will become bored, frustrated and unhappy. If this describes you, then you are doing a disservice to yourself and your employer. You are faced with a choice, claim the importance of your work or search for work that fits with your purpose or values. Your work is important, if you don't see it that way, then make room for someone else who may experience a closer fit. As you sort through your work discontent explore your options with your employer or supervisor, seek career advice with a Human Resource specialist or talk to someone you can trust.

This month review your personal purpose and check how it aligns with your work. If you determine it doesn't than write out a goal and attending tasks to do something about it.

Monthly Strategy Sheet

Strategy #1: Write SMART Goals.

Strategy #2: Control only what you can control

Strategy #3: Take energy breaks.

Strategy #4: Commit to exercising regularly.

Strategy #5: Make water a major part of your fluid diet.

Strategy #6: Think positively.

Strategy #7: Do kind acts.

Strategy #8: Get enough sleep.

Strategy #9: Purge the some-daystack.

Strategy #10: Align your purpose with your work.

Strategy #11: Turn failure upside down.

Strategy #12: Feed your spirit

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