

Stress Management Summary Handout Tips and Ideas on dealing with Stress

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The following are tips and ideas on dealing with stress. They are for educational purposes only and not intended to cure or treat any physical, emotional or mental situation or illness. You are advised to seek professional treatment from a licensed professional for stress and medical issues.

Introduction

Over the years I've ran into people with stress problems that were eating them alive. While we all have stress, controlling that stress and channeling it properly is like our immune system controlling and processing the damaged cells that can create major physical disease if left unchecked. Stress can do serious physical and emotional damage when not controlled and dealt with properly.

The stress that we will talk about is emotional stress that festers over a long period of time without resolution. What is the cause of this kind of negative stress? I have always felt that it is **when we lack control over a problem that threatens or has threatened something we care about**. When someone lives with their stressor for long periods of time (without resolution), their system can begin to break down under the strain. This can lead to life threatening illness, mental and physical.

So what do you do when faced with an emotionally draining stressor? This is what we want to address here, at least in part.

The following tips are mostly what I call "mind games". When you take a hard look at any stressful event, our negative reaction to it is often a mind game in itself and we can use other mind games to help reduce or eliminate its impact. (Please note that brain chemistry, general physiology and other factors can cause stress as well, but the focus here is mostly about how we think, and how we process stressful events in our lives via attitude and other tools.)

Many who have attended my seminars on stress have found the following tips to be very helpful in dealing with some of life's more serious problems. I offer them here for your consideration. They are my opinions and not necessarily the opinion of anyone else or any group. Please do not dismiss the use of licensed mental and physical health professionals in dealing with stress. The embarrassing stigma of going to a psychiatrist or therapist has been greatly reduced over the years, and I believe that this is partly due to the fact that many are bombarded with much more repaid fire stress than in previous generations. It seems that more people accept therapy and openly embrace it than ever before.

Visit the Doctor

While this is obvious, a checkup is often overlooked. If you find yourself having difficulty dealing with stress, bad thoughts, hopeless feelings, depression, anxiety, unstable behaviors, sleep problems, uncharacteristic conflicts with others, or any other behavioral or problems, then you should have tests performed by a professional. You want to eliminate the possibilities that your stress is from something physical such as problems with glands, hormones or other physical chemistry. I would seek two opinions. First, a medical doctor and second, a psychiatrist. There are physical and mental tests that can quickly identify issues and problems relating to stress.

Proper Sleep

This is one of the three pillars of good health. When you obtain enough sleep, the body repairs itself. When sleep deprived, you will not hold up or react as well to threats or problems. This is why sleep deprivation is used when interrogating subjects. Eventually, they cave in because their resistance is reduced by lack of sleep.

There is also evidence that the sleep you get before midnight is more beneficial than after midnight. In other words, eight hours of sleep starting at 9pm will be more useful than eight hours of sleep starting at 11pm. I've tried this and find it to be true.

A few of the benefits of proper sleep are improved immune system, disease resistance, body detoxification, cell repair, reduced inflammation, improved memory, brain chemistry rebalance, hormone and appetite control.

There is no set rule on how much sleep a person needs. If possible, let yourself wake up without an alarm and track how many hours you needed. Try this several times and on nights when you don't have set commitments the next morning. You may need anywhere from seven to ten hours. Some people need even more or less than this.

Exercise

Again, this is one of the three pillars of health. Benefits include physical strength, self esteem, mental focus, enhanced blood flow, lower depression, bone density, enhanced sexuality, speed/muscle response, immune system health, longevity, lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, major diseases reduced, enhanced life quality, enhanced oxygen, enhanced cell repair, weight control, energy increase. The great news about this is that a 20 to 30 minute brisk walk several times per week produces these benefits. In the past, people thought that harder intensity exercise was the key. This has mostly been disproven.

Nutrition

This is the third pillar of health. Benefits include fuel body needs to heal itself, weight control, faster healing, reduced infection risk, better mood, increased immune system, energy (entire day), better concentration, strong body, disease/ailment reduction, reduced inflammation, stress resistance.

I would consider going to any health food store and buying a Green Drink product that is all natural and packed with important nutrients that we fail to obtain enough of in our daily food intake. Have one of these drinks every day. They often taste terrible, but the benefits can far outweigh the taste.

It is a debate about what is healthy and what isn't. More fruits and vegetables and less meat have been reported as having serious health benefits. The juicing of fruits and vegetables are also beneficial.

Solving the Problem

Many tips deal with indirect action, such as exercise or meditation. These help cope with difficult times, but resolving the actual source of the stress and removing the stressor out of your life ranks number one when it comes to stress management from a non-metabolic perspective. When a solution can't be reached, then there are ways of living with the problem and reducing its impact. For example, owing back taxes can be solved, but a chronic long term serious illness isn't as clear cut and may require the person living with the problem but reducing its effect on their life.

Books/Internet

There must be thousands of books and web sites that deal with all types of problems. For those who can't or won't pursue in-person professional help, then books or web research about the problem may be the answer. Often, these are written by licensed professionals or people who have had the problem and resolved it. When costs are a factor in getting help, books and the web can be a very inexpensive answer for reaching a solution. Research into a problem need not be expensive or troublesome. Just be careful. Not all articles, books and web sites are right. Consider them as just ideas that will help you decide what your next step should be.

Taking Action / Facing the Problem

You might not have a solution, but just addressing the problem will help reduce the stress upon you. When a threat or problem arises and produces stress, some people avoid the issue while it haunts them emotionally. They often just wait for the next nasty event to happen, which can produce a feeling of helplessness, hopelessness and depression. Just by taking some action (even small action) towards fixing a problem, you can eliminate any "helpless" feelings and change your mood to a more positive "I can fix this" mentality.

Such actions might be researching, talking to experts and examining options. People who are most resilient to stress are able to face a problem, look at options, talk to others, and work on solutions even though the final solution may be a long way off. Yes, they would like to have saved the extra time, energy and expense they had to go through with finding a solution, but they still feel that such preparation is worth it since such action produces a "fight" mentality instead of a "helpless" one. Many times, people find that the threat really isn't as serious as they at first believed. While you may not have the solution, taking action to find a solution reduces or removes the feeling of helplessness that can cause deep, emotional pain and suffering.

I remember a man who was the target of a lawsuit. Of course, he received the letter in the mail on Friday night and was sick with worry all weekend about what might happen. On Monday, he took time off from work, did his research, talked to people, connected to an attorney and found that the situation wasn't very serious. Due to limits in the law, he was more protected than exposed. His worries left and he went about his business. The lawsuit came to nothing.

Escape

Escape has its place. Temporarily removing yourself from the battle can enable you to see more clearly and relax. It's like taking a vacation from the pain. Exercise, sleeping, entertainment, a vacation or just going to someplace pleasant for a while can rest your emotions and give you the break needed to recharge your batteries. Where escape becomes a negative is when people use "only escape" as their

weapon against stressors. You can sleep, exercise, avoid and play only so much, but at the end of the break, the problem is still there waiting for you to deal with it and may have become even worse.

Proactive Escape

This is when you change locations or environment, get away from the battle, have some fun and work on fixing what is wrong. Why a different location? Creativity improves. The old mental associations are gone. For example, let's say that you are trying to come up with solutions in your office. Even looking at the stapler on your desk could trigger old thoughts or memories that interfere with new, creative and fresh ideas. Removing yourself to a different, neutral place frees you from familiar memories and thought associations. Looking at a different stapler, the same thoughts and memories are usually not triggered. You may find that the creative process is enhanced. This is one reason why firms will take their people away to retreats. Old mental associations are reduced or eliminated, and new, fresh ideas are forged. You "escape" to find solutions to your problems and return ready to fix them and not to avoid them.

Avoid Obvious, Easy Triggers

Amy can't listen to the radio when driving to and from work because of all the depressing news broadcasts and disturbing stories. Bill gets stressed out from listening to his brother talk about his cases as a homicide detective. There are things in our lives that trigger our stress. Many of these triggers are simple, fully in our control and can be identified and eliminated.

Instead of listening to radio news, Amy can listen to other stations or music. Bill can tell his brother that he doesn't want to hear anymore about homicide investigations. If you take the time and watch for these triggers, identify and then remove or reduce them, you will lighten your stress load and then focus your energies on the problems that are more complex and not easily in your control. It can be a person, place or activity that triggers your stress response. If so, then identify, remove or reduce your exposure to that stressor.

One woman found that in a loud movie theatre, she would become unusually anxious. When she identified that as a trigger, she stopped going to loud theatres and just waited for the movie to be released so she could watch it at home. With that part of the problem solved, she can now further investigate what was the underlying cause of the anxiety if she wishes.

Release/Journaling/Transference

Talking about your troubles or feelings, writing about them in a journal, blowing off steam, and getting something off your chest all fall into the category of Release. Research shows that keeping negatives pent up inside ourselves is harmful. It has been found that people who release their frustrations and feelings are not weighted down and haunted by them. While it may be a mind game, it can be a key, effective tool.

In one study, workers who were going to be laid off from their jobs were divided into two groups. One group wrote in a journal about their feelings, fears and troubles that the upcoming layoff produced. The other group did not record in journals. After the layoff, most of the employees who wrote in their journals found new jobs faster than those who were not part of the journaling group.

In another situation, a man had failing health due to his failing business. He would go home and worry about it all night until he went back to work the next day. He then came up with a Release Ritual out of desperation. At 5pm each day, he wrote his troubles on a piece of paper and then threw the paper in a

trash can when he left his office. By transferring his troubles to the paper, he could leave them at the office and found that he now enjoyed his time back at home. The result was that he came back to the office each day with greater rest and peace, and was able to tackle the core problems more effectively.

One woman I knew years ago had cancer. Her doctor felt that her anger and hatred of her father was possibly a key factor behind her illness. But her father had died years before and she was wrestling with her emotions about him. The doctor had her write letters to her father telling him how she felt. Even though he was dead, she would read the letters to him and then burn them. From this exercise, she felt great relief and less anger about her father.

But you want to be careful here. When writing letters about, or releasing, serious emotional scars, you can resurrect some deep and painful emotions that were buried and out of sight. Release may very well still the answer but you may need the direction and guidance of a licensed professional during that process. I recommend that you consult a therapist or psychiatrist before attempting such a program.

Have a Major Life Purpose

Self help books from many authors say that this is a crucial key to happiness. Hope is a major stress reliever. When everything is crumbling around you, if you have hope, you will be more resilient. Having a purpose in life gives you hope, a mission, and something that makes the hard times worth dealing with. When you have a bad day, make sure there is at least one thing that you have to look forward to. This could be a hobby, relationship, project or helping others. If you don't know what your purpose is, then seek to find out. It is usually something that you love doing, that you are passionate about, and brings excitement into your life when you do it. It can be something that you find yourself daydreaming about, that inspires you.

Disputation

One of the finest tools for controlling stress is that of Disputation. Here is how it works. When you hear that unemployment is rampant, people are losing homes, and the media makes it sound like all will be lost, just look around and Dispute those fears. While unemployment may be high, you might notice that the majority of people still have work, are buying and selling, have homes and are not without basic needs. While becoming a victim of crime is possible, but you might ask yourself how many people you know have experienced the major criminal experience that continually worries you. On anything that creates fear and anxiety, look for evidence that the fear is unwarranted. Dispute the fear and worry.

When you hear bad news, look for evidence that the news isn't as bad as it sounds. One woman was bothered by all the disrespect and selfishness she encountered on the highway driving to and from work everyday. Using Disputation, she paid greater attention to other drivers and realized that there were far more good drivers than there were bad ones. Before this, the only drivers she bothered to take note of were the bad ones.

One person lost sleep worried about a repeat of the 1929 depression. Then he went to the mall one day and saw waiting lines to get into a fairly expensive restaurant. He noticed parking lots full at many stores. He began looking for signs that the economy wasn't as bad as some sources had indicated. From this, he found comfort and realized that some of the claims seemed unfounded, at least for now.

The caution about Disputation is that you don't want to use it foolishly. For example, if you have medical symptoms that would indicate an approaching heart attack, don't dispute this and try to explain

it off as something else that isn't serious. Any tool can be misused. Use Disputation to look for evidence of what the truth really is and not to deceive yourself about legitimate dangers.

Acceptance

Sometimes, we won't accept the truth about ourselves and won't accept reality. Perhaps you have a disability and yet refuse to accept that disability as a real part of your life now. As an example, don't think you can be an NBA basketball player with only one leg, or that you can become Miss America at age 35. As crazy as these two examples appear, there are people who won't accept what they should and they let that non-acceptance cause stress in their life.

You can't go back to being thirty when you are eighty, but you can accept your current situation for what it is and then find realistic and accomplishable goals that replace what was lost. Put another way, its one thing to look for solutions to problems, but to refuse to accept some things for what they are can actually cause more pain than accepting, adapting to, improvising and then overcoming the problem.

I had a client who was addicted to drugs for four years. One day, he accepted himself for what he was and threw his denial to the side. He came clean. He told everyone he needed to tell, apologized, asked for their help and beat the addiction. He later told me that this was the most liberating thing he had ever done. He was finally free when he accepted the problem for what it was. Before that, he could never have started repairing his life and making the progress he had finally achieved.

The key is accepting the right things and not the wrong things. We wouldn't accept something that is wrong or against our morals. You don't accept defeat when you can still win. While you may not be able to be a fire fighter, but you might find a substitute for this dream that is just as fulfilling. You may not be able to reverse your age, but you might be able to regain strength and energy through diet and exercise. This idea here is to stop fighting against something when that fight is slowly killing you.

Perhaps one of the best acceptance items is when people realize that life is filled with problems and that problems can be a very healthy and important part of life. Instead of avoiding problems, they willingly face them without feeling like a victim or that life is unfair.

Proper Optimism

Optimists rebound from setbacks much better than pessimists. Optimists expect setbacks to result in a better outcome. They look at the world as a place where they can prosper, and they don't mind the cost required to get where they need to go. Their own mental programming says that when they are knocked down, it is temporary, they will learn something important, they will improve and overcome the setback.

Where optimism becomes harmful is when we ignore any kind of negative. I call it "unhealthy optimism". The unhealthy optimist sits in the burning building and pretends everything is fine when they are in grave danger. There are people who swim in alligator infested waters and refuse to believe that they will be eaten. This over-optimism is dangerous.

A healthy optimist is fully aware of the risks, address those risks and believe that they can succeed based on realistic evidence. Optimists experience better chemical health. Good thoughts and moods produce beneficial chemicals (hormones and endorphins) in the body while pessimistic thoughts and moods produce harmful chemicals. An optimist will have a greater chance of good health and a happier life than a pessimist will.

A major, life changing setback will stress out and disable an optimist just as it will anyone else. The difference with an optimist is that they rebound faster. They accept the situation for what it is, look for remedies, do their homework and research, and they work to recover. They don't wait for others to fix the problem for them even though others may have caused the problem. They fully accept that it is up to them to make their life happier even if they are not responsible for the setback.

Brainstorming

An old technique, brainstorming is still a great way to work on the problems that are causing you the most stress. Basically, you write down a problem. Then for two minutes, you write down every solution and every idea that comes to mind no matter how silly or ridiculous the idea. This is really called "brain writing". Often, we think of verbally giving ideas in a group setting, and this works well also. But when you have to come up with your own ideas, silent brainstorming using a pen and paper works to open new avenues. It takes some practice to become really good at it, but in time you will find it a good tool. I suggest you always put a time limit on the brain writing session. Usually, two minutes is a good time. It forces the brain to become creative quickly. This, I feel, has allowed me to tap answers I never would have otherwise.

An engineer told me that his business was one million dollars over budget on a project. Through brainstorming, a solution was found that saved the day without cutting corners. The amazing thing was that one very bad idea sparked the winning idea. The bad idea was "blow up New York". Again, this was a crazy and ridiculous solution. But again, that idea later sparked another idea which ended up becoming the solution to the problem.

Avoid Mind and Heart Conflict

First, a few examples. The pilot who is afraid of heights. The animal lover who works in a slaughter house. The pacifist who is on the front lines of a war.

One of the greatest ways to stress yourself is to do something that is against your heartfelt values. When your heart and mind are in sync, there is much greater inner peace. Many people suffer stress from living lives that they disagree with. Finding who you really are and then working to make that your reality can be a great tool.

I knew a man who was going to college and barely surviving. His father insisted he become a dentist and he wanted to be something entirely different. His life was a mess. When he admitted the truth to himself and took a stand, he felt great relief and began to turn his life around. Now, he was doing what he wanted and not going against his heartfelt values.

The negative here is when your heartfelt values are harmful to others or violate law or societal norms. While "doing whatever I want" may sound like freedom at first, if our actions violate others, this often turns into a nightmare of guilt and new conflicts that can be worse than the original problems we sought to escape.

Avoid Distorted Beliefs

Again, a few examples. Everyone hates me. Everyone thinks I'm ugly. All (fill in the blank) are wrong and worthless people. I'm not successful at anything. The only good (fill in the blank) is a dead one. Everyone is a crook, they just won't admit it. People can't be trusted. All women are (fill in the blank). All (whatever religion) are self righteous, superstitious jerks.

We call these Distorted Beliefs. They aren't true but we act like and convince ourselves that they are. We may experience one or two incidents and then blow our conclusions way out of proportion. They are like lines of distorted programming that run through our brain as if they are real, and the brain will do what it can to protect itself from being hurt by the distorted belief.

For example if we believe that no one can be trusted, we will act like we can't trust anyone when dealing with others. Then we wonder why our relationships are dysfunctional, surface and unfulfilling. We wonder why we have no friends. Then, we use these observations as a confirmation that we are right about not trusting people. The Distorted Belief is then strengthened in our mental programming and we become more disconnected and protective when dealing with people.

The man who thinks every woman cheats in marriage may become controlling or even violent to prevent the cheating, and then lose his marriage. He then may blame the loss of his wife to the fact that she was actually cheating (just as he feared) when there was actually no evidence to support this. He may never realize that it was his own actions that caused the divorce as a result of a distorted, erroneous, unreasonable belief in his own mind.

Consider looking into your own belief system. When you find some belief that may be questionable, dispute it and look for evidence that confirms and rejects the belief as reasonable. You may find that a few of your own beliefs are unreasonable, distorted, and hurting your life thus causing you more stress.

Simplify Life

We often have too much coming at us at once. Having more commitments, expectations and responsibilities than we can handle creates stress and is one of the top reasons people break down.

One doctor who specialized in curing terminal diseases told his patients to get rid of one third of everything they owned. It was one of the first things he had them do. He said it had a cleansing, psychological effect on the mind, and the body would benefit as well.

Our world is in many ways overly complex. When we simplify our lives, we make it easier and faster to accomplish the same thing. It may mean prioritizing and cutting out the unimportant while focusing more on the important. Perhaps de-junking our home, creating better/easier systems and taking a new inventory of what is important and unimportant are in order here.

When one man received a call on his cell phone from China (in the restroom) he realized that his life felt like a million calls, emails, interruptions, commitments and data points were flying at him at 1,000 mph every day. That's when he reevaluated his entire life. He calmed it down by trimming the fat and concentrating on only the important priorities. Then when even those felt like too much, he looked at ways to become more proficient in those priorities. He developed new systems to save time, worry and hassle. It took lots of thought and trial and error to arrive at what worked. And it was difficult at first because these systems and methods of operation were all new. Eventually, they became habit and automatic. He could then handle the important matters in his life with far less stress.

Coping Statements

When I first started giving seminars, I would become nervous and afraid just before I went on. I was worried about such things as "what if I didn't know the answer to a question or what if I forget some of my material?" Then one morning, I was having these same worries crop up on a seminar I had given

many times. It was then that I said to myself “I don’t care.” Instantly, the worries went away. I physically felt the butterflies leave.

This is what is sometimes called a “Coping Statement”, which gives the mind comfort and helps change your attitude right on the spot.

“I don’t care” sounds irresponsible, and it is if used wrong. What I meant was simply this: “I’ll do fine. I’ll give a good seminar. I don’t have to know everything. People will benefit from this and leave with good information.” I simply said all of that to myself when I used the words “I don’t care”. The result was instant relief. For me, the statement “I don’t care” worked but for you, it may be a different statement in response to a situation that repeats itself and causes you trouble.

One man always said to himself “ain’t nothing we can’t handle” when problems hit. Again, this gave him courage, comfort and the ability to rebound quickly and attack the problem.

Statements like “It’s only money” is useful when you just spent your entire retirement reserves to save your sons life. While you are happy about your sons life being saved, you still would probably feel sad about having to start your savings all over again after decades of working. However, such a statement could help you cope with the loss of the money. In this case, it reminds you that money isn’t as important as human life.

Where this statement would be bad is when you are almost bankrupt, depressed, and you want to temporarily help your depression by going to the mall and spending your last \$1,000 of credit.

Stop Controlling the Uncontrollable

People worry about things that simply aren’t in their power. Wall Street, recent wars, the county’s debt load, the actions of adult children, etc. But in real life, we can’t control these things. We can influence them in our own small way such as voting, investing or not investing, joining or not joining the military, etc.

I’ve known people who placed upon themselves tons of stress by refusing to understand this one principle. **You can only control yourself and how you respond to situations.** I have no power over others and I’m not supposed to. Of course, children are in our power but only up to a point. The problem with some parents is that they want to control children that are perfectly able to control themselves.

I remember a father who tried to control his rebellious son. The dad was financially broke from legal bills from his son’s law breaking. He was also stressed over who the boy was dating and threatening to marry. Then the dad gave up. He just couldn’t take the stress any longer.

He told his son that he would have to cover his own legal bills from now on and that the boy could marry whoever he wanted. The battle was over. The boy tested his father only to find that the dad had really stopped trying to control him. As a result, the boy stopped breaking the law (he couldn’t afford the legal fees), dumped the girl and shaped up when he saw that the power struggle was finished and that he would face the consequences of his own actions. He made better choices much to the pleasure of his father.

I also recall the frustration of a mother who tried to control her adult children and grandchildren. She tried to childproof life for them and they rejected her attempts. They wanted to live their lives their way and without her help. The result was that her family distanced themselves from her and considered her a problem. She lived in constant anger because her children had deliberately put up fences against her.

You can only control yourself and how you will respond to life's events. You can influence some things but others you can't. Don't worry about what you can't control.

Compartmentalize

This is an old method but it works well. When at work, concentrate on work. When at home, concentrate at home. It takes practice but if you can break your life into small compartments, the worries of one compartment won't flood into another. For example, the person in a bad home life can find great peace and rest when at work, or the person who has a stressful job can find peace at home when they learn to keep each in a separate compartment.

This works for time also. In a stressful business meeting, for example, there is comfort knowing that this will only last for two hours and then things will be fine again. Or maybe you have a brief, but difficult call to make. Knowing that it will only take fifteen minutes and then it will be over can bring relief.

Don't take on others problems

There are people who want to transfer their problems to you so they can walk away free. Try to never let this happen if it could cause grief or unreasonable stress in your life. You will rob the person of important lessons and experience.

Instead, if you wish to help, then help them help themselves. You may have to show or teach them on what to do, but let them solve their own problem. You can be there for support and to talk if you wish, but keep their problem behind the line and out of your life.

Yes, there are exceptions to this rule but they are rare. Let this rule be your first response and then if the situation warrants, you can break it if needed.

Be Flexible

Flexible people have less stress and handle change better. If the wing of an airliner wasn't flexible, it would break. If buildings didn't sway at least a little, they would be damaged by high winds.

When it comes to stress, flexible means that when something doesn't go as planned, you switch to a new plan without letting the inconvenience ruin your life. If you aren't accepted at your dream university, maybe you try others until you are accepted. Then you formulate a plan that will eventually get you into the school you want.

If there are no openings in the department you want but you wish to work for a certain company, be willing to take a completely different opening until the desired opening presents itself.

When something cuts off an opportunity, go after other opportunities and don't waste time or become fixated on having everything just your way if that isn't feasible. Alter your path, plot a new course and achieve what you want using a different strategy.

Religion

While uncomfortable for some people, those secure in their religious beliefs are happier and less prone to the long term effects of stress. They have hope and feel that a higher power helps them in their daily lives. With that confidence (or faith), they are often able to face what others struggle to deal with.

Religion can cause stress and become a problem in someone's life as well. When I've seen this, it is usually because the person is misusing the religion and taking it in directions it was not meant to be taken.

An example is self guilt for having done something wrong. The person refuses to forgive and continues to punish their own self even though their religion says to totally forgive. Sometimes, they "self punish" hoping that if they do it to themselves, God won't, and He would be much harder on them. Or maybe they have a perfectionist view of how they need to act. They are too hard on their self when they fail to meet personal expectations. There are many reasons behind such behaviors but when religion is stressful, it is often due to the rules being misapplied or misunderstood.

Forgive

Festering hate of another only hurts you. The old saying "I'm going to drink poison until you die" applies here. Ongoing, negative emotions release harmful chemicals within the body which can diminish the immune system and other organ functions. Hate can lead to unhealthy emotional behaviors and beliefs.

One way to forgive someone who has wronged you is to recognize that the hate only allows them to continue to hurt you without their actually doing anything. Making a decision not to hate someone is a good first step. Usually, when a person understands the harm it is doing to their self, the decision to stop hating and to stop letting the offender live in their mind "rent free" is much easier.

Also, consider why they might have hurt you. While they still may have been completely wrong, consider what misunderstandings, stressors, mental illnesses, illusions, distorted beliefs, or anger problems they might have been dealing with which led them to take the action they did. When considering this, in no way are you saying they didn't do wrong. But if you can hook a reason to the offense, it can help you to cope with it.

One man used to become almost violent when cars would cut him off or make life threatening mistakes on the highway. He took such actions personally even though the offending driver may not have even noticed that they almost caused a wreck. In an attempt to get control of his anger, he thought it through and decided that there could be some better reasons behind their behavior. He decided that they might be on drugs (illegal or legal) which impaired their judgment, or that they may have just been given bad news such as their spouse was leaving them, or they were just stupid and clueless about how bad they were behind the wheel. By placing a reason behind the offense, he found that he coped with it better and was able to let it go much faster. He decided that no one in their right mind would deliberately cause an accident. By coming to terms with it on that level, his stress about such incidents was greatly reduced.

Comparing to Others

We've all heard that if we could choose problems, we would probably choose our own instead of someone else's. Whatever you are going through, remember that there are others who are enduring worse. A non life threatening illness may seem bad until you meet someone who is dying without hope of a cure. In one book, the author told the story of a man who lamented a leg disability until he met a man who had no feet. That one encounter changed his entire perspective. Now, he didn't feel so bad

for himself. If you look around, you will see others who have it worse than you and this may take much of the pain out of the problems you now endure.

Stop, Drop and Roll

It's a saying used for someone who is on fire but it is useful for stress management. When someone is overwhelmed with stress and starting to lose control over their lives, I always use this saying.

Stop: Kidding yourself, pretending, avoiding problems, avoiding decisions that need to be made, living with problems that could be solved. Stop and take the time to identify what the problems really are. If they can be solved, solve them. If they can't, then reduce their impact.

Drop: The things that are killing you. Simplify life. Put restrictions on how much the world can barge into your life. Drop the behaviors that continue to get you into trouble. Identify the sources and cut the behaviors that are not mission critical. Be smart about this. If your marriage is a problem, you may not have to drop the marriage from your life but rather you can, over time, drop the bad parts and keep the good.

Roll: Roll into problem solving, but be patient with the process. It takes time to undo things that have been years in the making. Take a situation that needs improvement and begin improving it. Roll into a problem solving mentality. Accept that problems are part of life, need to be faced and managed. Be alright with doing this.

The Five Whys and Self Analysis

This is a questioning method used to find the core problem. You will see it used in Six Sigma and other seminars where people think smoke is the problem, but find that fire is the real problem by doing some investigation and questioning.

For example, let's say you procrastinate. You may not think you know why you do it, but deep down inside you probably do have a very good reason, at least a good reason in your own mind. If you can find the real reason for something, your chances of fixing it are much better. And don't let the word FIVE fool you. You might only have to ask four questions or even forty in order to get at the truth. The word five is just a title for a concept.

As an example of using The Five Whys, you might ask the following question for why you are always avoiding doing a certain report:

Question: "Why do I procrastinate doing this report?"

Answer: "I just hate it."

That's not much of an answer, so you hold your own feet to the fire and ask the next question. You are willing to ask yourself questions until you get to what the real problem is. If you have trouble doing this with yourself, you can always explain it to someone else and have them be the questioner.

Question: "Why do you hate it?"

Answer: "My boss requires math in the report that I don't really understand."

Question: "Why don't you have your boss or someone teach you the math?"

Answer: "I've tried, but my boss was so rude about it and acted as if I was dumb when I asked questions."

Now the problem makes more sense. You are finally getting to the root issue. The real problem is not the report, it's not really the math, but the real problem is the boss and his/her inabilities when it comes to good management.

That didn't take five questions but there are those situations that might require over a hundred in order to analyze a complex problem.

We also use it for Conflict Management. When someone verbally attacks and you feel that they will participate in a discussion, ask them questions. It diffuses the anger quickly, gives them a chance to be understood and gives you information you may need. In many cases when I've used this, the other person had to admit that they were more of the problem than they wanted to originally admit. The questions naturally led them to a conclusion that was more accurate.

On the next three pages, I include sample dialogues using The Five Why's method of questioning.

The 5 Whys “Deflection” Method

Manager: Fred
Employee: Mike
Problem: Decreased Sales

Fred: I’ve noticed that sales have declined at least 2% for each of the last 3 months. Why do you think that is?

Mike: In my mind **morale** has been poor. Some of the sales people didn’t care for some of the department changes after we let John go. Some wonder if they will be next. You just can’t make changes like that and expect people to feel good about coming to work.

Fred: I’m aware of what you are talking about however we addressed this issue two months ago with the entire department and in my private discussions with the salespeople, they seemed alright with the new direction. Can you think of any other reason why sales might be on the decline?

Mike: I know that the new order **software** has about 5 different screens, but our old system had 2. When I’m talking on the phone with customers, I’ve noticed that it’s been hard not to get lost in the system. It makes us look like a bunch of idiots when we are trying to place an order and we have to fumble around with computer screens.

Fred: We need to look at that. Do you think we need more training on the software?

Mike: Absolutely!

Fred: But I still don’t see why sales would decline due to that. The salespeople could just take the information and input the order in the software after the call. We still use the old PriceNet software if they need to look up pricing or what’s in stock. Plus, many of our field reps who just call in their orders are noticing a decrease in sales. Why do you think that would be?

Mike: I never really thought it through, but I remember that one of my people ran into some new **competitor** that was trying to get into one of their customers. They were running a special promotion that was just introductory. Their pricing was about 5% lower on some of our products. We never really took them serious and haven’t heard much about them. It’s possible that they kept that pricing and are taking some of that market away from us.

Fred: Do you know what products they were pitching?

Mike: Yes, they were the DM3, DM4 and AV200.

Fred: Interesting. That’s the three products that are down the most for this last three month period.

The 5 Whys “Drill Down” Method

Manager: Fred
Employee: Mike
Problem: Decreased Sales

Fred: Mike, it’s good to meet with you. Your opinion matters and I want to run something by you for your insight. What you tell me is confidential if you wish it to be. I may ask you “why type questions” a few times but I think your observations will be helpful.

I’ve noticed that sales have declined at least 2% for each of the last 3 months. Our region seems to be the only region with this issue. Why do you think that is?

Mike: The online **software** is a pain to use. Instead of 2 screens, it now seems like we have 50 and it is confusing when you have customers on the phone and you can’t answer their questions because you can’t find the right screen. I’ve had two customers tell me that they have noticed a negative difference when they tried to place an order.

Fred: I know that software just consolidated about 6 different systems, but we trained the department on it when it first rolled out. Why do you think people are having such a problem with all of that training?

Mike: The **training** was not very good. In fact, it stunk! I know that most of us were more confused than ever after the training.

Fred: I understood that we brought in people from the company that actually programmed the software. I heard that these trainers were great when they hit the Dallas office. Why do you think they were so bad here?

Mike: The people we used were **not the same trainers** that Dallas used. When HR saw the price tag vs. our budget, they hit the roof. They decided to use some **local company** that was not affiliated with the Dallas training group. In fact, I think we were dealing with people who had barely looked at the software themselves.

The 5 Whys Conflict Management

General Manager: Cindy
Sales Manager: Mark

Mark: (On the attack) These activity reports every week are absolutely stupid. You must want my people to do these because you probably think we are all just a bunch of deadbeats.

Cindy: (Calmly) Why do you think activity reports are stupid?

Mark: They just are and you know it.

Cindy: Every company I've been with has had their sales people do activity reports. In fact, they show just how hard everyone is really working and how much effort it takes to make a sale. Can you think of any reason why we shouldn't have weekly activity reports?

Mark: Look, I guess they can be useful but they take up time from our busy sales day.

Cindy: Everyone has said they only take up about 10 minutes on each Monday morning, and that isn't much. They don't seem to mind doing them. Why do you feel that they should be eliminated?

Mark: We all know that management is not happy with my team's results in cold calls. You people just don't understand what it takes to make sales these days. We need to work with our active client base almost all day to make our quotas. We don't have much time for new customer prospecting or filling out reports.

Cindy: We feel that your team is a good team and that you are a very capable manager. We are pleased with many things you have done. When we asked for more cold calls, it was because the numbers indicated that you have done a good job working the existing customer base. Their needs have been met and we now need new business growth so we can continue to fill our sales funnels. Can you think of a reason why new business cold calls should not be pursued?

Mark: No, I agree that we will need new business for the future. However, the new procedures on generating client quotes are taking a toll on us. It used to take only 5 minutes to prepare and send a quote. Now it takes nearly 30 minutes with all the nonsense we go through.

Cindy: Well, we need to look at that. I didn't realize it took so long. Why do you feel that management thinks that your team is a bunch of deadbeats?

Mark: OK, here's the deal. I overheard the boss's son tell John Swenson that we were just wasting time in our sales meetings. What an idiot. I guess I took it personally.

Reprogramming the Subconscious

Our brains are like computers and are programmed based on everything we have heard, seen or concluded. Within the brain is the subconscious. It is just a brain inside the brain. It controls core beliefs, body functions and all memories. In fact, it can store memories that you don't even know you possess.

Now this concept isn't about hypnosis but this story illustrates how hypnosis can tap the subconscious mind. Years ago there was a couple walking in front of a bank who witnessed the bank being robbed without knowing it. They only saw the bandits get into a car, but they didn't know these two men had even robbed the bank. Employees ran out and stopped them as witnesses. The police questioned them and they remembered little.

But under hypnosis, the therapist was able to interview the couple and extract a full description of the robbers, the car and even the license plate number. The police were able to catch the men who did it.

In fact, many police departments have used hypnosis to help solve crimes.

If you tap the subconscious, you tap the control room of your behaviors, beliefs and makeup. However, you don't need hypnosis to do this.

Now, here is more about the subconscious mind. If your subconscious believes you are ugly, you will act as if you are ugly. If it thinks you are a success, then your behaviors will be more successful. The problem is that as a child, our subconscious believes just about anything it is told. In fact, adults are still prone to incorrect programming, meaning that we believe false or incorrect beliefs that are influencing our behaviors in negative ways.

We've all heard about "positive affirmations". Often, these are done wrong and have become the subject of comedy skits. Done wrong, positive affirmations are not effective.

When you hear about Self Talk, it is like positive affirmations, but it is done differently. It is used to remove bad programming from our subconscious mind and replace that programming with the programming we wish to have. It can take months of practice to see the effects but I have used it and it absolutely works when done correctly.

There are several books written on the topic by psychiatrists and therapists.

If you simply search Self Talk at Amazon.com or BarnesAndNoble.com, Google, etc, you will find good sources.

Here is how it is done:

You say to yourself a set of statements designed to change behaviors or beliefs

You rehearse them daily

You visualize the result as you repeat them

You feel emotion about what you are visualizing

In one case I used it in racquetball when I was in my twenties. I played tournaments but found that I needed to hit the ball more in the corner and closer to the floor. As a test, I used it to win over a man that I rarely beat.

My Statements:

You are a professional at racquetball

You love to snap the ball in the corners and barely off the floor

Few can retrieve a ball that I have hit

In three months, I was winning far more racquetball games than ever. The man I could almost never beat actually stopped a game right in the middle of it and asked "Are you taking lessons?" I've seen it used and when used correctly, it works.

One psychiatrist has used Self Talk to reprogram patients who had all types of problems ranging from smoke and weight loss to fears and phobias. His book is called "What to say when you talk to yourself" by Shad Helmstetter.

The bottom line is that you can change the way you think by correcting false beliefs and introducing better beliefs. You can reprogram your brain, your inner core, and thus enjoy better behaviors and performance.

Recommended Authors

Shad Helmstetter

Al Siebert

Kathleen DesMaisons

Martin Seligman

Dale Carnegie

Napoleon Hill

Norman Vincent Peale