



LEADERSHIP insights

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New workshops coming this year...

[Click here](#) for schedule &
registration information.

Coming September- your best stress management techniques.

Keep them coming
and email to me at
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(I won't include your name
unless you tell me to!)

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SERENITY OR STRESS: MY CHOICE

I worked for 20 years in the field of alcohol and drug abuse prevention and treatment. As I have taught leadership development the last several years, I've been amazed how many times the things I learned working in substance abuse parallel the stressful challenges in leadership and organizational development.

Case in point, the Serenity Prayer used in 12 step recovery meetings asks a higher power to "*grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*" Whether it is addiction or managing work stress, the same prayer applies!

And like this straightforward prayer, the answers to stress management are simple, not complex. Not always easy to get ourselves to cooperate though is it? In general we know what we need to do but a couple of things get in the way.

First, we are so *habituated to our unhelpful and unhealthy responses* (eating, drinking, sleeping, fighting, complaining, agonizing, etc.). We act unconsciously, our behaviors a well worn path to nowhere.

Second, we secretly *wish that the stress would just go away* and we'll be happy all the time. We know this is unrealistic but we kind of wish it anyway. The first step (not of the famous 12 steps...) is becoming aware of what we do. Then we can *proactively choose* something else.

Serenity:

What is your path to it?

However you get there, serenity is a place where we *let go of negative thoughts which create negative feelings*. We can't change other people or often the situation, and trying to do

so creates more stress. Ask yourself:

- ➔ What am I telling myself about this situation? (And how could I begin to talk differently to myself, to look for the positives, the opportunities)?
- ➔ What do I need to let go of? (Usually it's trying to control someone else or a situation, or being right).
- ➔ What can I do to soothe myself? (What are healthy ways I make myself feel better, maybe some I haven't done in a while. Make a plan for doing them).
- ➔ What are the things I need to do to build my self confidence? (Confidence comes from achieving goals that are within your reach. Think about something that would make you feel more confident and set a goal for it. Focus on that instead of the things or people you can't control).

Courage:

What is within our power to change?

When it comes to stress, most of us have control over our muscles but we don't think about them. Often when we are stressed we have tightness somewhere in our bodies that we don't even realize. Pay attention to what is happening in your body. *Right now, are you tensing your muscles?*

- ➔ Notice your jaws, hands, forehead, shoulders, any part of your body that is holding tension.
- ➔ See what happens when you consciously "soften" any tense part of your body, even for only a moment.
- ➔ Set your timer for 30 minutes and check again-if you find the same tightness as before, soften again.

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Most of us also have control over our breathing. Under stress, most people breathe shallowly. **Breathing deeply is no small thing.** Minimizing how important it is to get oxygen to the brain is giving up something on which you can take immediate-and effective-action. *How are you breathing right now?*

Wisdom:

Do I know the difference between what is within my ability to change and what is not?

One of the most memorable reminders about wisdom from those substance abuse treatment days is "never let yourself get too hungry, angry, lonely or tired," also known as the **H.A.L.T.** reminder for preventing relapse-and it's perfect advice for stress management too. Self-assess the following:

Hungry: *Am I feeding myself junk? Am I numbing myself with food? Am I not eating because of stress?*

- Just for today, consciously eat delicious and healthy foods, to nourish and care for yourself in this way because you deserve healthy food.
- Go back to the notes above, take a deep breath and soften your muscles before you start to eat.
- You don't put contaminated gas in your car and you can't run it on empty. Take a break at work and **refuel yourself.**

Angry: *Am I irritable? Is there hurt underneath that anger? Do I need to assertively ask for*

something from people in my life? Am I doing for others what they could be doing for themselves?

- At work learn to delegate. It helps you and it grows your people.
- If your anger is coming out "sideways" in sarcasm, it won't get you what you want in the long run. Explore the origin of your sarcasm and then you can find a real solution.

Lonely: *Am I isolating myself? Could I reach out more to others?*

- Focusing on others can be one of the best antidotes to our own troubles and it keeps us from thinking we are the only one dealing with challenges.
- For leaders struggling with challenging management situations, reach out to your peers. They are going through some of the same struggles and you can help each other.

Tired: *Do I have unused vacation time? Do I use good sleep hygiene habits (reducing caffeine, pets in their own beds, regular sleep times, turning off electronics, etc.)?*

- Imagine what it would be like to be fully rested.
- The next time you are laying awake worrying, promise yourself that you will allow yourself to worry when the sun comes up. Put it all on a shelf for the night; the mind is capable of believing what you tell it!

When the discomfort of the stress becomes bigger than our resistance to making a change in our old habits, that's when we can start to make different choices. In the meantime, try one thing.

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