



Dear Friend,

Pressure-Cooker

Do you ever laugh at yourself? I know I do. And, I know that some of you laugh at me too; I've gotten your calls or emails after you've read some of these **EA Insights** messages.

Well, let me tell you about staff members who laughed at me, and also gave me a good chuckle, a while back. You see, we worked in an extremely stressful environment -- the subject matter we dealt with was stressful; the work conditions were stressful; and there were constant deadlines, short fuses, and much tension. (Are you getting the picture?)

Now, if you know me, you know that I'm a pretty low-key person. But, according to this group of staff, despite how low-key I might have tried to be, they knew full well when I was steamed. And, guess what tipped them off. A song. Apparently, they came to realize that, if anyone saw me moving quickly down the hall, ...heard the faint sound of humming...steer clear!

The funny thing was that they were right, and I didn't even realize what was happening until that laughed about it with me one day. When the usually go high, I moved (as soon as I could, that is) and the humming began (usually a hymn) in order to calm myself down and regroup quickly before addressing whatever madness was going on at the moment. I admit, it was an interesting coping mechanism, but it was effective nonetheless.

How do *you* cope with stress? Let's face it. Though our pressures may be different, the bottom line is very much the same. We all get stressed! The question isn't *whether* you'll face pressure; it's what you'll do *when* it pops up.

With that thought in mind, we dedicate December's **EA Insights** to stress -- why we have it and what we can do about it. I hope you find this edition helpful generally, but especially as we face the holidays and the end of the year.

So, from the Executive Advantage team to your team, we wish you a relatively stress-free and Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
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How Do YOU Handle Stress?

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In my role as a management consultant and coach, I constantly interact with people who are stressed. Take:



- The frazzled exec who's calling to schedule an appointment because far too much that should be done by others seems continually to find its way onto his plate; or
- The working parent who's madly trying to juggle family and workplace and to do so without experiencing an overwhelming sense of guilt about what's happening in either setting; or
- The professional who's feeling caught in a no-win situation, faced with a challenging supervisor and/or colleagues but unable (or unwilling) to make changes.

Now, compound those regular, daily stresses with the thought of holiday planning, end-of-year commitments, not to mention family gatherings. Can you feel your pulse quickening?

Stressors

What causes stress for you? You might think that it doesn't matter; you just know that you're stressed. However, by becoming familiar with your sources of stress, you'll find that you are better able to develop healthy and well-targeted coping mechanisms.

For most people, those lovely little culprits fit into one of three general categories. Let's call them "The Three Fs" -- Fear, Frustration, and Family.

Fear -- What's more likely to pump adrenalin into your system than a good, solid dose of fear? And, quite honestly, it could be fear of just about anything -- fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of success, fear of rejection, fear of mice, fear of heights, and the list goes on. The point is that you have a thought, which is what a fear is, and that thought now is redirecting your physical and emotional resources to *it*, rather than to the matter at hand.

Frustration -- I once read a great definition of *frustration*. It's what we feel "when things don't go our way and we feel powerless to change them." How true! So, if it's a small frustration here or there (a driver who cuts you off, a staff meeting that starts late), the stress level is probably negligible or short-lived. However, if the number or the gravity of frustrations begin to grow, so does the stress level.

Family (including friends and close others) -- It never fails. The folks closest to you can be the ones who contribute exponentially to your rising stress level.

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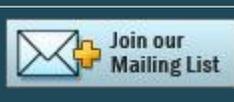
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"Quotes"

"At work you worry over the family at home. At home you fret over work left undone. Behold the working woman's stress."

~Elaine Cannon

"Stress is an ignorant state. It believes that everything is an emergency."

~Natalie Goldberg

"With increased opportunity comes increased stress. The stress comes from multiple conflicting demands and very little in the way of role models."

~Madeline Hemmings

"To have a good enemy, choose a friend; he knows where to strike."

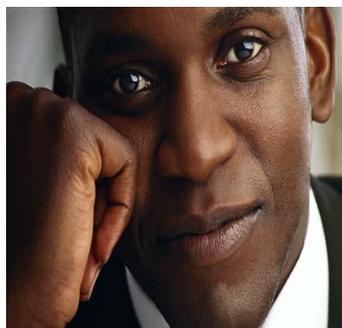
~Diane de Poitiers

"Long ago an Eastern monarch called his wise men together and asked them to invent a motto, a few magic words that would help him in time of trial or distress. It must be brief enough to be engraved on a ring to be ever present. It must be appropriate to every situation, as useful in prosperity as in adversity. It must be a motto wise and true and endlessly enduring, words by which a man could be guided all his life,

And, it makes sense. We remain guarded with, or have low expectations for, strangers. On the other hand, it's the people we feel we should be able to count on, who should know us, or who should know better that cause us the deepest level of grief.

Coping with Stress

So, what do you do when things start heating up? How can you handle the stress? Here are six tips that should help. (And, using the first letter of each, we'll spell "stress.")



Stop blaming (yourself and/or others). It's important to take responsibility. Yes, you misread the calendar and the report is due tomorrow and not next week. Yes, your boss waited until the last minute to tell you about tomorrow's presentation. But, spending an inordinate amount of energy casting blame isn't going to help you focus on how to tackle the real problem before you. So, vent for a minute if you must, and then, move on!

Take a step back, and assess the situation. Okay, are you breathing again? Once you can get past the anger, try to get some perspective. Be objective, and figure out what's really going on. What happened? What's the impact? What has to be done? What resources are available? Looking at the situation for what it is, and not as the monster being created in your mind, will help to reduce stress.

Recognize what's realistic. Sometimes we make a stressful situation more so by clinging to unrealistic expectations. The report's due tomorrow, and you're just starting to write. Clearly, it's not realistic to think that you'll have a document with the same level of polish that could have been produced by a full team that labored on it for a month. So, don't add to the stress by trying to create *that* report. Determine what is realistic under the circumstances; make that your goal; and then work toward it.

Establish excellence, not perfection, as a target. I had a mentor who shared this tidbit with me early in my career. (My husband says that she probably said it after watching me go crazy one too many times.) The fact of the matter is that nobody is perfect. So, striving for perfection will only make you (and those around you) batty. Seek to be excellent. Seek to do things well. Seek to have people know that, if you give your word, they can count on you unless something truly extraordinary happens. But, drop shooting for perfection. It's not even a realistic stretch goal; it's just a target you'll never meet.

Select how much control over you you'll give to others. Think back to one key category of stressors -- family, friends, and certain others. Although these are the folks closest to you, it doesn't mean that their emotions or actions must direct yours. Instead, make a conscious decision not to surrender control over your responses and emotions. Are you in a workplace with a screaming boss? Nobody says that you have to make his lack of control your own. Do you have a mom who constantly compares you to a sibling, and you always come up short? Nobody says you have to adopt her measuring stick. Remember, the frustrations come when you feel as if you've lost control. Stress is lowered when you take that control back.

Stay positive. Don't forget that whatever is causing you stress is just one situation. It's so important to remember the other things that are going right for you at the moment -- the things you enjoy and do well, the people who do support you, the goals you have, etc. If you need to do so, reach out to someone who can help you recount the positive aspects of your position, even during a trying period. However, by giving in to negative thoughts, you compound the stress of the situation with unproductive thinking. So, stay positive!

Stress is normal, and its potential is all around us. The keys to keeping it at a controllable level, though, are recognizing what may be producing pressure for you at any given time and then taking the steps to prevent stress from taking over.

in every circumstance, no matter what happened. The wise men finally came to the monarch with their magic words. They were words for every change or chance of fortune ... words to fit every situation, good or bad ... words to ease the heart and mind in every circumstance. The words they gave for the ring were: This, too, shall pass away."
~Proverb

"If you had to define stress, it would not be far off if you said it was the process of living. The process of living is the process of having stress imposed on you and reacting to it."

~Stanley J. Sarnoff

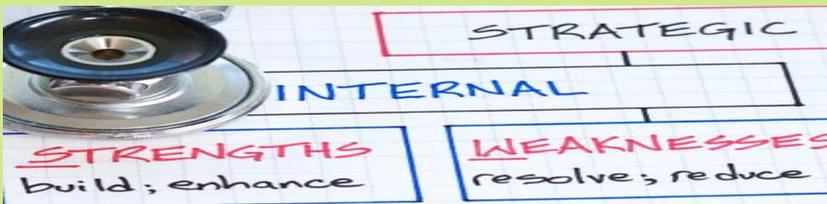
"Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one."

~Hans Selye

"Never give up! If adversity presses, Providence wisely has mingled the cup, And the best counsel, in all your distresses, Is the stout watchword of 'Never give up.'"

~Martin Farquhar Tupper

Finances... Customers... Staff... Growth... Do you know where your gaps are?



Whether you operate on a calendar year or another fiscal year, *now* is a perfect time to do a status check of how you'll end 2010 and move into 2011.

Let **Executive Advantage** help you find your gaps. Contact us today to schedule your Annual Organizational Status Check.

This 4-session program is designed for organization executives and business owners. We'll help you to:

- Re-examine your mission, vision, and values
- Assess the current status of your 2010 business goals
- Evaluate how your organization's operations and people management have helped or hindered your ability to reach your goals
- Uncover possible disconnects between leadership and staff understanding of your mission, structure, approach, and business goals
- Map out areas for attention in 2011, and begin to decide how to address them

Call us at 301-280-5950 or contact us online at www.execadvantagellc.com so we can talk about how to make this happen for you.

2011 really is right around the corner. Are you ready?

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us **online** or at **(301) 280-5950**.

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