

The corona virus pandemic has many people *stressed* and we all know that's bad. Right?

In a research study in 1998, 30,000 people were asked 2 questions:

- 1) In the past year, have you experienced low, medium or high levels of stress?
- 2) Is stress good or bad for you?

Over the next 8 years the people with high levels of stress had a 43% higher death rate, **except** for the high stress subgroup who said **stress was good for them**. They had the **lowest rates of death** of any group.<sup>i</sup> Whether stress is good or bad depends on **how you perceive stress**.

Bruce Springsteen and Carly Simon describe the same symptoms of stage fright before a performance: sweaty palms, racing heart, rapid breathing and stomach butterflies. Bruce has a **confidence** response. He knows he's going to put on a great show. Carly had a **freeze** response. That's why she didn't appear on stage for over 6 years. (She has since returned.)

How can you change your response to stress from freeze to confidence?

- 1) **Acknowledge** stress as a functional adaptation to the situation. Awareness is the first step to separate you from your stress.
  - 2) **Accept** stress as a natural response to something that is important to you and *Don't sweat the small stuff*.<sup>ii</sup>
  - 3) Determine the **causes** of your stress, then categorize them as:
    - A) Those that have a practical solution.
    - B) Those that will get better over time.
    - C) Those you can't control.
- 3.A) Tackle those that have a practical solution with logic, not emotion. Look at **facts, not feelings** for your solution. Talk to a trusted advisor, **make a plan** and stick to it.

3.B) **Patience!** Your problem is temporary. In 5 years is this going to matter?

3.C) Don't ruminate. **Let it go.** To develop this skillset, try meditation; it reduces anxiety.<sup>iii</sup> Not good at meditation? Exercise works to reduce anxiety.<sup>iv</sup>

4) Review and **set new priorities.** Are you taking on too much? What's really important here?

5) View your problem from a **different perspective.** Your house got repossessed. You are now **free** from the mortgage and the leaky roof.

6) **Don't run** from stress. **Adapt** to it, as well as you can. Avoidance strategies backfire and drain emotional resources.<sup>v</sup>

7) **Take a break.** You're not Captain America. Practice self-care and self-compassion. Self-compassion decreases guilt and stress.<sup>vi</sup>

8) **Connect with loved ones.** Close positive social relations are the single most effective way to maintain both your physical and mental health.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> A. Keller et al. (2001) Does the perception that stress affects health matter? *Health Psychology*. 2001 Sept.: 31(5) pgs. 677-684

<sup>ii</sup> R. Carlson, "Don't sweat the small stuff." Hyperion publishing, (1997) Title of bestselling book. I recommend it.

<sup>iii</sup> M. Goyal et al. "Meditation programs for psychological stress and well-being." *Journal of the American medical association-Internal Medicine*. (2014) 174(3) pgs. 357-368

<sup>iv</sup> P. Carek et al. "Exercise for the treatment of depression and anxiety." *International Journal of Psychiatry Medicine*. (2011) Vol. 41 (1) pgs. 15-28.

<sup>v</sup> Baumeister, Faber, and Wallace, (1999) Coping and ego depletion: Recovery after the coping process. In C.R. Snyder. "Coping: The psychology of what works." (50-59) Oxford University Press

<sup>vi</sup> A. MacBeth, "Exploring compassion: A meta-analysis of the association between self-compassion and psychopathology." *Clinical psychology review*." (2012) Vol. 32 Issue 6, pgs. 545-552

<sup>vii</sup> R. Waldinger, "What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study of happiness." TEDx Talk, 2018