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STRESSING UPON A CRITICAL NEED

PLANNED to begin with something eloquent about stress applied in measured amounts allowing one’s inner strength to grow and develop. Just earlier today, chatting with my friend and colleague, I shared how profoundly at ease I am at this stage in my life – having weathered several major battles and earning my badge of experience (if not wisdom!).

Stress, like depression, is a word that has entered our everyday lexicon and in this issue almost entirely focused on work-related stress, I hope to convey that there is a severity to the condition that should not, and cannot be dismissed. In the same breath, I hope that education and access to accurate information can remove the stigma that prevents people from seeking help and the support they need.

In my time, I have met many amazing people – brilliant minds, creative individuals – among them, people who have also endured so much in life that it has almost entirely extinguished their ability to cope.

Do take a moment to breathe, and read on:

Dr Glenn Williams focuses on how leaders can provide an environment conducive for their teams to perform and excel. In our Brain Bulletin, Francois Bogacz helps us understand what happens on a physiological level when we are under duress. From a learning perspective, Amanda Chua talks about managing talent development programmes effectively. In light of the gravity of overwork suicide, Dr Laura Cordisco Tsai addresses the topic of managing workplace stress and Joseph Tan writes about emotional considerations towards employee engagement excellence.

Helpful hints for public speaking (which has certainly been a source of anxiety for me) by Lim Lay Hsuan and tension-releasing exercises by Foo Siow Huei. Last but not least, Alvin Dan writes about the importance of emotional awareness for youth in an ever-changing world.

Stress is not easily quantifiable, nor is it experienced in the same way. I am humbled by the people who strive every day to support those who struggle against the stressors of life. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to write for such programmes, perhaps we can initiate proactive steps in overcoming work-related stress.

In the same breath, I hope that education and access to accurate information can remove the stigma that prevents people from seeking help and the support they need. In my time, I have met many amazing people – brilliant minds, creative individuals – among them, people who have also endured so much in life that it has almost entirely extinguished their ability to cope.

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Have a fantastic weekend all!

KAREN NEOH
Editor
leaderonomics.com

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DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

By LIM LAY HSIUAN
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ACCORDING to Towers Watson Staying@ Work Survey Report 2013/2014, Asia Pacific; employee stress is identified by employers as the top risk factor when it comes to health and productivity in the workplace. Despite concerns about employee stress, only about a quarter of employers in Asia offer stress or resilience management programmes. Thus, instead of relying on employers for such programmes, perhaps we can initiate proactive steps in overcoming work-related stress.

Here are three practical ways to start with:

1. DECLUSTER, DECLUTTER

The sight of a cluttered workstation only aggravates a cluttered mind. Clutter distracts, weighs you down and invites stress into your life.

It takes one step at a time to start clearing off all the unnecessary at work. Plus, an intentional effort and great discipline to keep clutter at bay.

Reorganise your files in alphabetical order, and set up a labelling system to help you identify the level of urgency of all incoming documents. This exercise extends to information and digital clutter, i.e. folders, files and email in your computer.

“Three Rules of Work: Out of clutter finds simplicity. From disorder finds harmony in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.” — Albert Einstein

2. LAUGH OUT LOUD

We often hear phrases such as “laughter is the best medicine” and “a cheerful heart is good medicine.” How true are these statements?

“Humour also boosts our energy and diminishes pain, as laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body’s natural feel-good chemicals.

In a fact, a good, hearty laugh not only relieves physical tension, it also leaves your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after.

At the workplace, share a joke or a funny story with your fellow co-workers to help each other relax and recharge.

“The experience of humour relieves emotional distress and assists in changing negative thinking patterns.” — Dr Steven M. Sultanoff

3. VOLUNTEER

The 2013 Health and Volunteering Study released by UnitedHealth Group found that 79% of people who have volunteered in the last 12 months say that volunteering lowered their stress levels.

Essentially, volunteering enriches our sense of purpose in life. The thought that we are chipping in to help a community teaches us to learn valuable things about the world at large and about ourselves.

The exposure we get when helping those in need opens up our minds and hearts to the fact that there are more pressing challenges faced by the community than the work challenges we face. Why not check out https://www.facebook.com/DoGoodVolunteer to find out where you can start volunteering?

“We know volunteering is good for your soul. But do you know that volunteering drives up productivity in organisations?” — Roshan Thiran

To conclude, take baby steps to manage your stress at work. Start controlling your work-related stress before it begins to cripple your life and well-being!

The opinions expressed in this career guide are those of the writers or the people they quoted and not necessarily those of Leaderonomics.

“Stress will be our constant companion, the little gray monster trying to be overlooked, until we root out its effects as deeply as possible.” — Deepak Chopra

“If employees succumb to work-related stress by falling sick, companies will suffer. This is because the core asset of any organisation is its workforce.” — Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye

“Seventy-five per cent of healthcare costs are associated with chronic illnesses. What’s a key driver of chronic illnesses? Stress.” — Norman B. Anderson

“The mind can go either direction under stress — toward positive or toward negative, on or off. Think of it as a spectrum whose extremes are unconsciousness at the negative end and hypervigilance at the positive end. The way the mind will lean under stress is strongly influenced by training.” — Frank Herbert

“I promise you nothing is as chaotic as it seems. Nothing is worth diminishing your health. Nothing is worth poisoning yourself into stress, anxiety, and fear.” — Bennett et al

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JOIN US!

Every Friday from 6pm to 7pm
STRESS RELIEF
BUILDING A CULTURE WHERE PEOPLE CAN PERFORM

By DR GLENN WILLIAMS
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“I’ve heard this statement mentioned quite frequently recently, as I work with leaders who are concerned that they are having difficulties implementing their business strategy. This statement is often attributed to Peter Drucker, renowned for being one of the world’s leading management thinkers and writers.”

It might seem strange to highlight such a statement here, particularly as this article focuses on leaders managing workplace stress by helping them create an environment whereby highly effective teams can perform.

BELIEVE ME, IT’S RELEVANT!

I don’t think anyone would disagree that it’s reasonable for leaders to expect a level of competency in the workplace, of themselves and of those they lead, to ultimately enable businesses to achieve their objectives.

The problem is that no matter how solid your strategy, without the right workplace culture, it is unlikely you will achieve what you set out to do if the organisation is not resilient or adaptive, then adjusting direction would turn out to be far more costly, from a budget and social capital (people) perspective.

Stephen M. R. Covey, in The Speed of Trust, addresses this from the perspective of cultivating an environment of trust, and how this one virtue can change everything about your business.

Its presence or absence has an impact on your credibility. Not only in regards to your own leadership reputation, but in relation to the responsiveness of others to what you are asking them to do.

For the discerning leader, this all makes perfect sense, especially with the understanding that building the right organisational culture takes time.

But there are others who quickly dismiss this as being unrealistic, often at the expense of their own health and the business.

Let’s take a look at the pitfalls of this thinking.

Robert is the owner of a large construction company that has struggled to win three large projects. They are losing business, money, and reputation.

Recently two of his most experienced managers chose to leave the company and work for a competitor. Angry at their decision, Robert made no attempt to understand the reasons behind them leaving.

He thought that losing two experienced managers wasn’t going to hurt the company.

On the upside, he now had two more wages he didn’t have to cover. He could elevate someone else into a management role on a lower salary.

The situation quickly deteriorated.

Some of the staff that had previously worked under these two managers left over the next three weeks.

Projects were now falling behind schedule, placing greater demands on a diminishing team.

Robert now had to contend with disgruntled customers and concerns that the quality of their work had fallen due to the loss of experienced managers and builders.

It was inevitable that this had begun to take a toll on Robert’s health and his family.

Although there’s always a risk of over-simplifying some issues in a truncated story, let’s make some observations relevant to our topic of building a culture where teams can perform.

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER
First, it is naive to expect that experienced managers and employees will remain with our businesses forever. People are no longer merely looking for a job that pays a salary. They’re seeking a career that fits with their life goals.

From a CEO survey of the top 100 companies in the UK, 68% ranked talent and human capital as the top priority. Another survey indicates that for graduates entering the workforce today, they will have 13 jobs by age 38.

Robert needed to ask himself a series of questions: Why would someone choose to work for his company and not someone else’s? What incentives are being offered? What type of work culture would make it a more attractive place to work than a competitor? Are there opportunities to acquire new skills and gain broader experience?

STRESS SPREADS
Second, it’s incredible how a leader’s stress can cascade down an entire organisation, often functioning as a catalyst for other reactionary decisions.

And it is precisely these things that can do so much damage and undermine the very virtue that Covey believes is core to a leader’s credibility – trust!

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, discusses how to cheat chaos, and how it is largely dependent on a person’s ‘coping style’.

This is influenced by three different kinds of resources:

• the availability of external support
• a person’s psychological resources (intelligence, education, relevant personal- ity factors)
• the different coping strategies a person uses to manage stressful situations

It is critical that leaders seek out resources they need to help them cope with the stress they will face in managing a business.

Moreover, they need to be more aware of the types of behaviour they model to those they are leading.

LEARN FROM YOUR SITUATIONS
The third observation from Robert’s situation is that he made no attempt to understand the reasons behind his most experienced managers leaving the company.

Not learning from this situation leaves the company susceptible to others taking the same action.

What we can conclude from these observations is that leaders have consid- erable power to influence their organisation’s culture – positively and negatively.

A leader’s ability to create a healthy workplace culture and mitigate the normal stresses that occur in running a profitable business is, therefore, invaluable.

WHAT’S THE BOTTOM-LINE?
Some questions leaders might ask themselves include:

• What strategies have I put in place that gives me adequate time to listen to my staff and invest in their professional welfare?
• Is my behaviour as a leader consistent with my values and what I am expecting from my staff?
• How am I creating opportunities for my staff to develop new skills? What are some ways I can empower my staff to achieve goals that will help them grow?
• Do I always have to be right or do I allow my staff to contribute?

Glenn Williams is a senior faculty of Leaderonomics focused in the area of inside-out and reflective leadership. His passion is to see leaders succeed at work and at home, the two areas where they can make the biggest difference. You can contact him at editor@leaderonomics.com

myStarjob.com, Saturday 6 September 2014
The Strained Brain: The ‘Just Right’ Rule of an Equilibrium

By FRANCOIS BOGACZ
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Stress at work is an issue that most organisations publicly swear to address with vigour and determination. But what is stress, actually? Let’s start from the biological definition of stress: “an organism’s response to a disruption of its physical or psychological equilibrium”.

The disruption can be danger, loss of control, the inability to predict the future, or an acute physical or social pain.

The response is a cascade of physiological reactions designed to protect you from the disruption, using different hormones that include cortisol (see box). However, moderate stress is actually good for the brain. Like many other organs, it is mobilised to restore equilibrium, which means it becomes more focused.

Let us take the example of the prefrontal cortex (PFC), the “CEO” lodged in the anterior part of your brain which manages all big decisions, thoughts and plans. Apart from cortisol, two other chemicals may arouse the PFC in a situation of stress.

The first one is called noradrenaline and it triggers the flight or fight response in our nervous system – no surprise if it starts to flow in a situation of stress.

The second one, called dopamine, is released when you anticipate a reward. It might look counter-intuitive to link reward to stress, but if for instance you are about to make an important presentation in front of your team, you will often feel a mix of anxiety of failure and motivation to succeed.

The critical thing about the flow of those three fuels in our brain, as shown in Figure 1, is that their impact on the capacities of the PFC follows an inverted U-curve. When the flow is too little – during times you are bored or fatigued, i.e. fuel-depleted – your PFC has very little effectiveness. When the flow is high enough, the PFC reaches its peak of effectiveness.

However, if the flow continues increasing and gets too high, the stress becomes too much and the PFC shuts down. This makes you lose your self-control, your focus and your capacity of reappraisal. You revert to your habits, impulses and emotions. We all know it: if we feel too much stress before a presentation, we sweat, we have a dry throat, we can’t find our words, etc.

With such a reduced perception of control of the situation, more stress comes into our brain and body, causing an even lower perception of control. This is the perfect recipe for failure if we do not break the downward spiral.

As a result, our bodies become more sensitive to external attacks, interpreting this vulnerability as a stressor, which in turn reinforces the downward spiral.

When facing uncertainty and difficult challenges at work, our bodies naturally develop the stress responses as described above. With a positive consequence, this causes a better arousal of the PFC. However, any additional pressure in such a situation will push you down the slope of the inverted U-curve.

What you need is the exact opposite of pressure – help and support, which allows you to feel that you are in control.

What does a good coach whisper in the ear of his team player when he or she is under too much stress and has made too many errors? Does he inflict more pain, threaten, and do other things that heighten stress? No. Instead, he helps the person change his or her perspective by using positive words. He emphasises past successes, leverages reformulation, reappraisal, positive visualisation, etc.

Unfortunately, few managers have been trained to act that way. Many believe that it is good to apply significant psychological pressure on their people and to add to their already full plates with more projects and objectives. They increase complexity rather than decrease it, and at times throw the whole organisation into a downward spiral – or down the cliff, to use the good old lemmings’ metaphor.

In their perspective, globalisation dictates the game, and stress is normal, because there is uncertainty everywhere and struggles for everyone. Unfortunately, in situations of uncertainty, we do not need more complexity, but less, in order to succeed.

I invite all my readers to read a book by Gerd Gigerenzer called Risk Savvy: How to Make Good Decisions to learn more about how to better face uncertainty.

Paraphrasing that great book, I think that we will all benefit from being more “stress-savvy” by building on this new knowledge to create upward spirals in our organisations. I hope that this article has modestly contributed to this goal.

François Bogacz is a facilitator and mediator, specialised in the application of neuropsychology to leadership, diversity and conflict resolution. He helps individuals and organisations maximise their potential by understanding the human brain at the emotional, social and cognitive levels.
MANAGERS AS CONDUCTORS

TALENT DEVELOPMENT SYMPHONY

By AMANDA CHUA amanda.chua@leaderonomics.com

A
t with most established organisations, many
with vested interest in their talents would
actively engage them by accelerating their
development to the next level.
An example would be the Talent
Acceleration Programme (TAP) by Leaderonomics—a full-
scale leadership development programme with multiple
interventions involving long-term partnerships and cus-
tomised growth frameworks.

The role of a talent development programme (TDP)
manager is the crux of most successful programmes
whereby they act as the link in various capacities, creat-
ing a conducive environment for talents to perform.

Their role encompasses not only
managing the demands of the
programme, but also juggling dif-
ferent resources and elements
expected of the programme for the best
possible outcome.

To ensure success, TDP
managers are responsible for
managing different stake-
holders: clients, talents and
delivery partners (i.e.,
trainers, project spon-
sors, and mentors).

CLIENTS
Client engagement is
crucial. Managers have
to understand the needs,
oBJECTIVES AND FINAL OUT-
comes expected. This is
to develop leadership pro-
grames that meet their needs
and accelerate growth of their people.

Constant engagement also adds value to the proc-
ess as managers actively seek information from clients
to ensure alignment and to meet their expectations.

TALENTS
TDP managers journey through the duration of the
programme together with talents to build long-term
relationships and continually engage them for a better
learning experience.

TDP managers serve as connectors to help talents
understand the process and how the programme’s flow
relates to the expected outcome. They are also key to
helping talents understand the overall expectation of the
programme, and at the same time, act as sounding
boards to provide feedback and progress checks.

This provides talents the opportunity to share their
ideas on development for further customisation to take
place.

DELIVERY PARTNERS
TDP managers take ownership of the delivery and
execution of the programme. Like a conductor, they liaise
with all parties to ensure every aspect of the customised
development journey is meaningful and impactful.

This includes working closely with delivery partners
to achieve specific outcomes with respect to the co-relating
element.

On top of ensuring all arrangements meet with the
talent’s competency gaps, they serve as a voice to
highlight the programmes’ progress, and ensure that
all stakeholders are aware and involved throughout the
process.

WITH TDP manager as the anchor and
conduct that glues the programme
together, it is imperative that we man-
age our role and stressors well.

We need to be at our best to bring
about optimum learning and growth
experiences for our talents, and for
them to get the support they need.

To manage a conducive environ-
ment for highly effective individuals
to perform can be stressful at times.
The best experience I can draw from
would be based on my own exposure as a TDP
manager.

Often, we are like conductors, with
various stakeholders to attend to.

More importantly, ensuring that
talents are given the right learning
equipment to grow and develop their
potential as leaders is integral.

How, then, do I as a TDP manager
maintain a conducive environment
for all our talents to shine?

In order for the whole process
to take place seamlessly while
meeting its objectives, here
are a few tips which I
would like to share from
my experi-
ence.

■ It’s all about perspective

Being a TDP manager
is not a straightforward
role with the various
complexities involved.

Instead of being intimi-
dated by my circum-
cstances and having a
negative outlook, I see the
importance of my role as
development partner.

When faced with a
complex situation involv-
ing many factors, I see my
work and the manage-
ment of various variables
as an opportunity to excel.
My perspective in
approaching tough
situations stems from
the belief that effective results can be
achieved at maximum productivity,
with the right combination of elements
and stakeholders, to attain a desirable
outcome.

Over time, I have acquired the ability
to thrive in the dynamic environment
and would naturally dive into compli-
cated challenges.

■ Making room for flexibility

Sure, there are unexpected situations
that might arise along the way. This
requires the need to be flexible.

This is when my strength as an
arranger emerges. I find enjoyment
in the process of aligning and realigning
multiple factors until I find the best
approach to achieve the desired out-
come according to my immediate stake-
holder’s expectations and needs.

Though there are many instances
which require me to think on my feet, I
like the opportunity to connect the dots
and figure out how things fit together.

When I am confronted with the unex-
pected, I would seek new options and
possible partnerships which might lead
to a better solution.

■ Be gracious to yourself

We have tendencies to be hard on
ourselves—especially in pursuit of
striv-
ing for perfection and excellence.

However, having that unrealis-
ic expectation to achieve perfection adds
unnecessary stress upon ourselves.

This also applies to understand-
ing your capacity and not tak-
ing too much workload upon
yourself.

Some of us do struggle with
letting go and delegating. But,
throughout my learning journey
of being a TDP manager, I have
learnt to reach out, collaborate and
bounce ideas with my team and
found great benefit in that.

They not only give me feed-
back on areas I can further
improve on, but also great
guides and support—they help me
see things differently and propel me
forward.

CONDUCT YOUR
WAY AS A MANAGER

Being a conductor and leader in an
orchestra is about finding beauty in
bringing everything together in perfect
harmony for each instrument/individual
to shine.

Quoting Bill Rancic, The Apprentice
season one winner, ”To be successful,
you have to think of yourself as an
orchestra conductor. A conductor may
not be an expert at each instrument,
but he knows how to make all of them
work together harmoniously and make
beautiful sound.”

Ultimately, we can all be conductors,
and just as any great conductor, we can
conduct the different variables of our
roles to create perfect harmony and
produce the best music for everyone
involved.

EFFECTIVE RESULTS CAN BE ACHIEVED AT
MAXIMUM PRODUCTIVITY, WITH THE RIGHT
COMBINATION OF ELEMENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS,
TO ATTAIN A DESIRABLE OUTCOME.

mystarjob.com, saturday 6 september 2014

mystarjob.com, saturday 6 september 2014
By KAREN NEOH

In the award-winning play by Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman, Mark, and now in his old age they take his salary away. It’s not easily quantifiable, nor is it experienced in the same way.

The one who remains mum on the subject may be suppressing overwhelming levels of pain that arise from being a workaholic—specifically.

In an analysis of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Chang of found that although economic impacts were the most severe in Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines, a 1.6% increase in the suicide rate in Singapore.

In a study by Harvard research-professionals – Harvard researchers on 600,000 people died from overwork in 2010.

In the workplace, stress is a sociomedical term that refers to “fatigue or associated work disability due to cardiovascular attacks such as strokes, myocardial infarction or acute cardiac failure aggravated by a heavy workload and long working hours.”

In 1995 to 3% in 2007.

Even fully-employed workers – workaholics become sick. In 2000, 20% of regular Japanese employees worked 50+ hours per week, compared to 30%–50% in New Zealand, Canada and the U.S. Moreover, a 2004 survey of 2000 healthcare professionals – Harvard researchers found that nearly one in three healthcare professionals have been exposed to a 40% increased risk of heart disease compared with colleagues who are not.

In the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the ILO suggests to:

Companies:

Employees:

Government:

Forced resignation, dismissal and resignation due to staff cutbacks.

What to do

MANAGING WORKPLACE STRESS

On this important topic, I reached out to a remarkable woman I worked with, Dr. Laura Cordova Thak. She is currently an assistant professor at George Mason University, the United States, has studied in the Stanford University and has worked in several countries in Asia.

Thank you for your time, Laura. From your personal experience and from your area of expertise, do you have any advice on how to manage stress at the workplace?

An important first step is realizing that everyone, and with strong face, stress at work. There is no job in the world that is free from stress. It is important to cultivate self-awareness: is there any work or stress within ourselves. Are we having difficulty sleeping or concentrating? Can we do more?

Emotional intelligence is another critical component of managing stress. When we're stressed, we may send negative verbal or non-verbal messages to our colleagues that can come across the wrong way — possibly creating more stress, confusion, and mistrust with others.

Learning how to manage our own emotions in the workplace and making sure that they do not spill over onto other people is an important step in ensuring a healthy workplace. Identifying what stressors are important to us and what coping strategies work best for us is the key to managing our stress.

Conflict resolution, communication, empathy for others, and self-awareness are some important coping strategies that can help manage stress. For example, when someone's actions are impacting others negatively, it’s important to communicate this to them in a way that is respectful and considerate.

When people experience loss and grief in different ways, there are some common symptoms of grief – sadness, anxiety, fear, anger, guilt, and depression.

Many people use their physical symptoms as a coping mechanism – like taking sick leave or calling in sick. These symptoms are not limited to men. Women who are often in a dilemma between their work and family are at a higher risk of experiencing occupational stress.

Forced resignation, dismissal and resignation due to staff cutbacks.

Stress, like depression, is a word that has been misused.

Coping with compassion fatigue is a two-way street.

Coping with compassion fatigue is a two-way street.

Each person has their own way of coping with stress. It helps to talk about one's difficulties with others who have experienced similar situations.

An important first step is realizing that everyone, and with strong face, stress at work.
THE ART OF PUBLIC SPEAKING
IT TAKES TIME AND PRACTICE

By LIM LAY HSUAN
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THE butterflies in my stomach fluttered as I saw how my co-workers from other teams presented their part effortlessly and with confidence. It almost looked as if public speaking came naturally to them. I was totally awed by their skills.

It was my first-ever business simulation presentation in front of my colleagues and the esteemed panelists. Before long, I found myself standing in front of everyone with a dry mouth, racing heartbeat and shaky voice. If you have experienced similar public speaking fear indicators like me, you are not alone.

Here are seven principles for impactful presentations, taken from a session conducted by Eric Lau. (Unfortunately, I only attended the training a week after the “ordeal” was over.)

1. PLAN AND PREPARE
Do your research and prepare well. Understand and familiarise yourself with the topic so that you won’t be caught off guard during your question-and-answer session.

Determine how much time you are given and break it into smaller segments on what you want to speak about.

Remember to arm your presentation with a strong opening to get your audience excited and finish with an equally impactful ending to leave them with something to act upon.

2. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE
Find out who your target audience is.

Are you presenting in front of a group of youths or corporate executives? With a group of youths, for example, extra effort might be needed to retain their attention.

Before long, I found myself standing in front of your team members so that they can give their feedback instantaneously.

You may also want them to help record your mock presentation so you can evaluate it and see where you can improve accordingly.

3. AVOID MEMORISING
Bear in mind that when you present, you should be interacting with your audience and not dictating your presentation notes.

When you start reading from your notes or presentation slides, you lose the connection with your audience.

Your audience is likely to know that you’ve been memorising because you seem to be thinking hard to recall what is in your mind. In the process, it makes you look mechanical.

The danger of memorising is that once a point slips from your mind, the chance of you fumbling the rest of your points is greater.

4. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE
Practice makes perfect. Even when there are no pending presentations, you could seize opportunities to speak in front of others, whether you are at work or at play. Likewise, take some time to practise your piece in front of the mirror. By looking at yourself in the mirror, you will train yourself to be more aware of your body language and gestures.

If it is a team effort, spend some time rehearsing in front of your team members so that they can give their feedback instantaneously.

You may also want them to help record your mock presentation so you can evaluate it and see where you can improve accordingly.

5. BE YOURSELF
To envision yourself as a good orator like Abraham Lincoln is commendable, but keep in mind that being yourself when presenting is the key to allow your audience to see you for who you are.

People are usually able to connect better with you if they see the “real” you, rather than as someone trying too hard to fill in someone else’s shoes.

This does not mean that you remain status quo with your level of presentation skills. In fact, you should project yourself getting better as you present more, but with that unique touch of your personality.

6. ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE
When you speak in front of your audience, treat it as if you are engaging them in a dialogue. This makes you less isolated as a speaker while you keep your listeners attentive to your presentation.

As with a conversation with a friend, try your best to communicate clearly, coherently and respectfully.

7. PRACTISE GOOD PUBLIC SPEAKING TECHNIQUES
In my opinion, I see public speaking techniques that were shared during the training as something similar to the techniques used in choral speaking.

The main difference is, of course, choral speaking involves a bigger group of people and is less intimidating.

As they always say, the more you push yourself to speak in front of others, the better and the more confident you will become.

By Lim Lay Hsuan
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The techniques include the following:

- **EYE CONTACT**
  Maintain eye contact with your audience.

- **VOICE PROJECTION**
  Mentally divide your audience into three or four segments from the left to the right, and consciously make that connection and build rapport with each segment so none is left out.

- **GESTURES**
  Keep your movements to the minimal to avoid distracting your audience.

- **PAUSES**
  Instead, leverage on arm movements that are congruent with your message.

- **WORD EMPHASIS**
  You want to be catching showing three fingers when you mentioned you have four points to share, would you?

- **PACE**
  You may speed up or slow down certain parts of your speech to make it more dynamic and lively.

- **PRACTICE**
  Practice what you know now, and not give up.

Ever wondered how can you be a hero and a leader in your community? Find out more on how you can be one by joining the DIODE Camps this coming school holidays! The DIODE Camps are specially designed programmes for youth aged 13–16 years to enrich their leadership discovery journey. The camps encompass a wide range of activities to provide the campers a unique camping experience and at the same time grow and build themselves to becoming the next great leader!

**DIOODE**

**Date:** Dec 1–6 | Dec 15–20 | Youth Leadership Camp: 14–16 years old
Dec 3–6 | Dec 17–20 | Teens Leadership Camp: 12–13 years old
Dec 8–13 | School Leavers Camp: 17–19 years old

**Venue:**

DIODE Camps **A**pproaches to **E**difies **E**xcellence

**DIODE**

**Dates:**

Dec 1–6 | Dec 15–20 | Youth Leadership Camp: 14–16 years old
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**VENUE:**

Starfresh AgroPark, Seremban [Youth Leadership Camps & Teens Camps] SUTHER Crescent, Tapah [School Leavers Camp]

**DIODE** = Discovering Ingenuity, Opening Doors for Excellence
STRESS AND S-T-R-E-T-C-H!

By FOO SIOW HUEI
editor@leaderonomics.com

S TRESS is not just a feeling; stress is a natural body response to threat or challenges in life. The muscles in our bodies are designed to contract in times of danger and relax in times of safety.

The contraction of muscles helps to protect our bodies from harm or possible death. This mechanism is known as the “fight-flight” response.

On the other hand, when we feel safe and our muscles are relaxed, we are open to connect with each other. That is when relationships are strengthened and nurtured. In modern days, we face tension and anxiety on a daily basis – starting from the time we commute to work (i.e. traffic jams), to meeting deadlines and firefighting when an unexpected emergency arises.

The build-up of tension in our bodies can be harmful to physical health and our interpersonal relationships, especially if these tensions are not released for our bodies to return to its original balanced state.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF STRESS?

■ Individual

Prolonged tension stored in our bodies can cause many health issues. Common ones are muscle aches, insomnia or poor quality sleep, indigestion and low immunity.

When we are prone to falling sick, productivity and work performance can be badly affected. Stressed out people can get angry, irritable, anxious and depressed easily. They can also experience difficulty in getting things done because of their inability to focus.

When we are in “fight-flight” mode (contraction of muscles), we are no longer open to build- ing interpersonal relationships. In fact, very often, relations- ships with colleagues and family members can easily be strained when we are stressed. In this state, we focus solely on fixing things (flight) or avoiding social interaction by distancing ourselves from others (fight).

■ Team

It is crucial for any team to function effectively to work towards common goals. According to teamwork expert, Patrick Lencioni, in his book The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, lack of trust is the first obstacle standing in the way of team effectiveness.

Trust is the key to a successful team. It is key to open up rooms for honest feedback, constructive debates and willingness to seek support. However, a stressed out individual tends not to trust people, for fear that his/her openness will expose him/her to similar threats or challenging situations as experienced before.

People under chronic tension often find themselves unable to trust, even though they may actually prefer to do so.

The remaining four dysfunctions as identified by Lencioni are:

■ Fear of conflict.
■ Lack of commitment.
■ Avoidance of accountability.
■ Inattention to results.

These symptoms can be easily identified in underperforming teams, and very soon, good team members will be driven away.

BUILDING TEAM RESILIENCE TO COPE WITH STRESS

Let’s face the reality of this modern world; we can’t avoid stress entirely. So, it is important to build a team with high emotional resilience to cope with daily stress and tension.

Many corporations dream to have team members with the ability to face adversity, navigate through stressful experiences and rise to the occasion with ease.

Engaging our bodies with stress relief exercises will be highly effective. Once our bodies break away from a tensed-up posture (contraction), our minds will be able to relax, and we will be able to connect with people around us.

TENSION RELEASING EXERCISES™ (TRE)

Created by Dr David Berceli, TRE is a simple technique that releases stress or tension which accumulate in our bodies from daily circumstances of life.

TRE is a revolutionary approach that deliberately uses simple exercises to invoke tremors which are then self-regulat- ed, it does not require recalling past events. We simply engage our bodies to release the stress and tension stored within.

TRE benefits many people in every aspect of an individual, and these include:

■ Physical body – TRE reduces muscle and back pain. It promotes better sleep, and increases energy and endurance.
■ Emotional level – TRE helps people manage workplace stress and anxiety better.
■ Social level – TRE helps improve interpersonal relationships with less conflict and greater emotional resilience.

TRE can be taught in one-to-one or group settings. This technique is gaining popularity around the world among organisations, companies and individu- als from different walks of life. Testimonies from people who practice TRE mentioned how they have improved the way they handle stress.

CONCLUSION

“It’s not the load that breaks you down, it’s the way you carry it.” – Lou Holtz

The key here isn’t about eliminating stress and pressure entirely, it is about how you and your team handle it as it comes. Building an emotionally resilient team with the ability to handle stress isn’t a one-day job.

With consistent practice of effective methods, it is very achievable. Always remember to engage both your mind and body, as they are very closely connected.
A woman under stress is not immediately concerned with finding solutions to her problems but rather seeks relief by expressing herself and being understood.” — John Gray

ATHY and her husband hold high-paying jobs that both come with high pressure and heavy workloads. However, Kathry cannot comprehend the fact that her job seems to be stressing her out more than her husband.

On a bad day, she spends her time complaining of her fate to her husband or spending countless hours reeling angrily on the couch. On the contrary, her husband takes a different approach. After a 10-minute vent out session, he is in front of the television, tuning in to his favourite sports channel or taking the dog out for a walk.

Shelly Taylor and her colleagues from the Health Psychology Department of the University of California conducted a study and these were their findings:

When it comes to handling stress, men adopt the “fight or flight” approach whilst women move towards a “tend and befriend” response whereby they need comfort and care from loved ones, usually family members or friends.

WHAT STRESSES WOMEN?

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) in a research which surveyed 1,501 employed adults, compared to men, women are consistently reported to have higher levels of work stress and frustrations. They also tend to feel more underappreciated and underpaid at work.

The study reported that women feel more tensed at work as compared to men (37% of women vs 33% of men). They also feel that there are not enough opportunities for them to advance internally in terms of career growth (35% of women vs 43% of men).

In the same survey, 48% of women employees felt that they were not valued by their employer. While both genders felt that their salaries did not match up to their jobs, women were more likely to feel that they are inadequately compensated.

According to Lauren Weber and Sue Shellenbarger from the Wall Street Journal, the current working women's stress levels have increased significantly over the years, in line with the responsibility to bring in more income for the family.

Weber and Shellenbarger say that today, a working woman’s contribution to the family is about 47%. This is higher as compared to 1980 when the ratio was only 38%.

Another cause of stress would be the lack of time. A study conducted by the American Families and Work Institute in 2012 found that nearly 50% of women feel that they do not have enough free time for themselves and this eventually leads to them getting stressed. This is not a good sign as increased stress levels can lead to the rise of a hormone called cortisol.

Abnormal levels of cortisol can increase the risk of acute illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes. An article published in the journal Molecular Psychiatry reveals that women are more sensitive to the stress hormone corticosterone releasing factor. This may explain why women succumb easily to stress and depression compared with men.

TACKLE THAT TENSION

According to the anxiety expert and clinical psychologist Tamar Chansky, PhD, once stress escalates, it becomes more difficult to let it go.

He says the secret to letting it go is to count to ten and say something without causing real harm releases tension, ”says Chansky.

WHAT CAN THE BOSSES HELP?

Employers play a very important role in ensuring that employees do not get overwhelmed by stress as this will significantly affect the productivity of an organisation.

The head of APA Centre for Organisational Excellence, David W. Ballard, PsyD, MBA states that employers have to acknowledge that their staff have responsibilities and lives beyond the workplace.

Here are ways employers can tackle stress among their employees:

- Talk to the employee
  Practise open communication. This is critical in leadership. Update your team on goings-on in the workplace, their performance and your expectations. This helps them keep track of their progress and reduces anxiety.

- Remember that open communication works both ways, thus listen to their concerns and problems and address them accordingly.

- Praise your employees when they perform well or come up with fantastic ideas. It strengthens the working relationship and certainly eliminates feelings of being under-appreciated.

- Flexi-working scheme
  For women, a major stress inducer is the rigid working hours, especially if they have a family. Giving your employees the privilege of having a flexible work-time scheme or remote working arrangement shows that you trust them and empower them to manage their time effectively.

- Instead, just do something that you find fun and do not involve you feeling like it’s a responsibility.

- Build a stress resilience
  Identifying your team’s stress-related issues and helping them come up with good resistance displays an employer’s good stress management skills.

- Providing employees training on assertiveness, positive thinking, stress management and time management will also enable them to deal with stress more effectively.

- Whenever stress starts brewing, Prema quickly unwinds by meeting up with friends for a chat or watching a comedy show. To connect with her, email prema.jayabalan@leaderonomics.com
Always remember this advice that the older generation, mostly uttered by the Chinese-speaking community (not that I personally use the language much), has passed on: “I’ve eaten more salt than you have rice.” This is used when a young person is attempting to advise an older person. Often times, the older one will disregard it because he/she has more experience, and has probably seen more in life. However, from another point of view, it can also be perceived as the older generation having better reasons to feel stressed because of the responsibilities and expectations on their shoulders.

In this regard, being a young person with “fewer” responsibilities gives the expression that his/her feelings of stress are not valid.

**STRESS — A REALITY AMONG YOUTH**

As a youth leader and a psychology graduate, I believe that everyone has a different degree of tolerance to stress. While it is true the older generation have a different experience in their lives and justifiably so, we also have to admit that the younger generation now faces a reality that is more challenging than what it was 10 years ago.

Youths these days face a plethora of stress inducers, be it from family, friends, studies and social media. While it is important to have support from the people closest to you, as well as a safe avenue to speak up.

As such, it is vital to have support from the people closest to you, as well as a safe place to share your stories of achievement and distress.

For some youths, they may have never had the privilege of parents being around throughout their growing years. I will not deny that these are probably major contributing factors to emotional awareness and distress.

As such, it is vital to have support from the people closest to you, as well as a safe place to share your stories of achievement and distress.

More than that, however, growing up in maturity is a personal decision and a journey of self-discovery. After all, the ball is in our own courts, and it will rely on our directed actions.

**THE HIGHS AND LOWS**

The adventures of life can bring a person through “mountaintop” and “valley” experiences. And it is the fullness of these life adventures that will help a person grow in awareness and maturity.

There are some basic concepts for emotions. Firstly, emotions come and go. The feelings that linger on are considered moods, not emotions.

Another important concept for emotions is that there are no good or bad emotions. The key lies in the way we respond to or express the emotion.

For example, many may believe that being angry is wrong, but that is not true at all. Anger is a very important emotional component in life. If you see injustice, for example, having anger towards the situation is justified. In spite of that, there are a number of different expressions that can come out from it.

One person may step up and defend the person in need by taking proper action such as informing the right authorities. Meanwhile, another person may approach the wrongdoer in rage and act violently in order to stop the injustice. Both utilise the emotion of anger, and both may be able to diffuse the situation of injustice. However, one protects while the other induces fear towards the other person.

**JOURNEY TOWARDS EMOTIONAL AWARENESS**

Since having a safe space and communication channel is important for a young person’s emotional awareness, we, as Leaderonomics, make sure that we incorporate important values in our various programmes.

In our DIODE (Discovering Ingenuity, Opening Doors for Excellence) Camp initiatives, for example, relationship and growth are among the two key values that we uphold.

As a team, together with our facilitators who join us for our camps, the greatest joy is for us to build strong and good relationships with the campers.

It is also especially gratifying to see them bonding within their own groups. Some may click immediately, some may take a few days, and some may not even be able to engage with others throughout the camp.

No matter what the outcome, I know that there is no question about the results of being faithful in building relationships with youths and giving them a safe avenue to speak up.

This is because I have been at the end of that journey, with youths calling me to share the experience they had with us in camps.

I also have parents calling up to share how DIODE camps have led to a better change in their children.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

In short, the experience for teenagers is summed up as just this: “The one thing I enjoyed most in camp is being able to speak freely and have people help me through processes in my life.”

Simple conversations, focusing on how they feel about something or gaining experiences from the journey of a peer can have helped them grow in their emotional awareness.

To every young person out there, be strong and of good courage. Seize the day and find the right people who would help you through your journey. Trust me when I say, your adventure has just begun.

Alvin Dan is one of the youth programme executives at Leaderonomics. His personal passion lies in community development. Using his skills in behavioural psychology, he plans to continue developing his expertise in counselling in order to assist others. To engage with Alvin, email editor@leaderonomics.com

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**BONUS INFO**

allow me to share some online quizzes that I took recently; one being the empathy quiz and the other being the emotional intelligence quiz.

To really find out your level of emotional awareness, these two quizzes can be a really good start.

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take_quiz/14

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/sl_quiz

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If you would like to read up more about emotions, I personally read a lot of the writings of Dr Paul Ekman (http://www.paulekman.com). He is the pioneer for the term “microexpression”.

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**Health Matters**

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EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT EXCELLENCE

WHAT’S EMOTION GOT TO DO WITH IT?

By JOSEPH TAN
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In today’s highly competitive environment, employees often complain about being “squeezed” to perform, with ever increasing expectations imposed. While it is valid that organisation leaders expect performance compliance, there are two fundamental emotional considerations which are neglected because competency considerations take precedence.

Workplace stress is a largely emotional issue. Hence, competency frameworks are limited in its effectiveness towards effective employee engagement. We need an emotional consideration instead.

Here are a couple of emotional considerations to capture the hearts and minds of our employees.

EMPLOYEES NEED COHERENCY

Stress is symptomatic of a life which is “spread too thin” – a state of being whereby someone is trying too hard to be everything.

In Gallup’s survey of 10 million employees (ranging from a wide-spread of input from across the job spectrum with representation from each major continent), the results are clear – employees who have the opportunity to do what they do best every day are six times as likely to be engaged in their jobs and three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life in general.

The traditional approach of focusing on “areas of improvement” (which is a diplomatic definition of weakness) inevitably leads to stress because employees are asked to do more of what they are not wired to do while their area of strengths are sidelined.

It is unfortunate that in certain organisations, recognition comes as an after-thought rather than a proactive process of designing the employee’s job around what they do best every day.

The job description becomes the mould by which the employee is ‘squeezed’ into. The role then has become more important than the soul.

The starting point of building a culture of engagement excellence is the identification of personal strengths.

Without this fundamental approach to organisational development, there is no coherency between the role and the soul – which sets the stage for employee disengagement.

Setting performance goals without considering personal strengths is like deciding on the destination without first considering the capacity of the vehicle.

EMPLOYEES NEED CONVOLUTION

Leaders are driven by a strong sense of purpose. KPIs (key performance indicators) are hardly motivating elements by themselves.

In fact, just playing the “numbers game” adds more to the employee’s stress. The key engaging task for the organisation leader is the connection of purpose with the expected performance.

In other words, pushing for the “what” of performance without internalising the “why” of performance does little to motivate the employee to go the extra mile.

A simple indicator on whether the “why” has been adequately addressed is the regularity of authentic conversations.

It takes more than just corporate communications to connect with the hearts and minds of employees, because we are wired for authenticity.

How can conviction be forged if leaders do not listen to the opinion of their followers and do not make the effort to create alignment between personal aspirations and corporate performance?

The opposite of conviction is scepticism. When leaders preach the message of engagement without actually reaching out in personal conversations which focus on what the employees do best, then no amount of corporate communication will turn things around. This is because of the inconsistent grass roots experience.

The saying is true – “I don’t care how much you know until I know how much you care”.

Just dishing out team building programmes regularly will not improve engagement if the managers’ conversational habits do not change for the better.

In fact, a fantastic team building programme will fall flat if there is no commitment from the manager to engage his or her employees in regular conversations.

IN SUMMARY

Here’s the bottom-line: While processes and events do contribute towards a culture of engagement excellence, it is the emotional experiences at the end of the day which either build or destroy employee loyalty and commitment.

As an organisational leader, ask yourself regularly:

- Am I creating coherency by helping my employees to focus on their strengths?
- Am I creating conviction by taking the initiative to engage in authentic conversations?

Consistent and positive emotional experiences initiated by great managers are necessary to reduce stress, which can lead to disengagement in the workplace.

Joseph Tan is the CEO of Leaderonomics Centre of Engagement Excellence and is passionate about ensuring all Malaysian employees are fully engaged in their work and with their organisation. If you would like to enhance the engagement levels at your organisation, email people@leaderonomics.com for more details.

Also next week

Malaysia United: day of integration
Malaysians making their mark
Leadership lessons from local movies
Datuk Seri Idris Jala on Malaysia and Malaysians