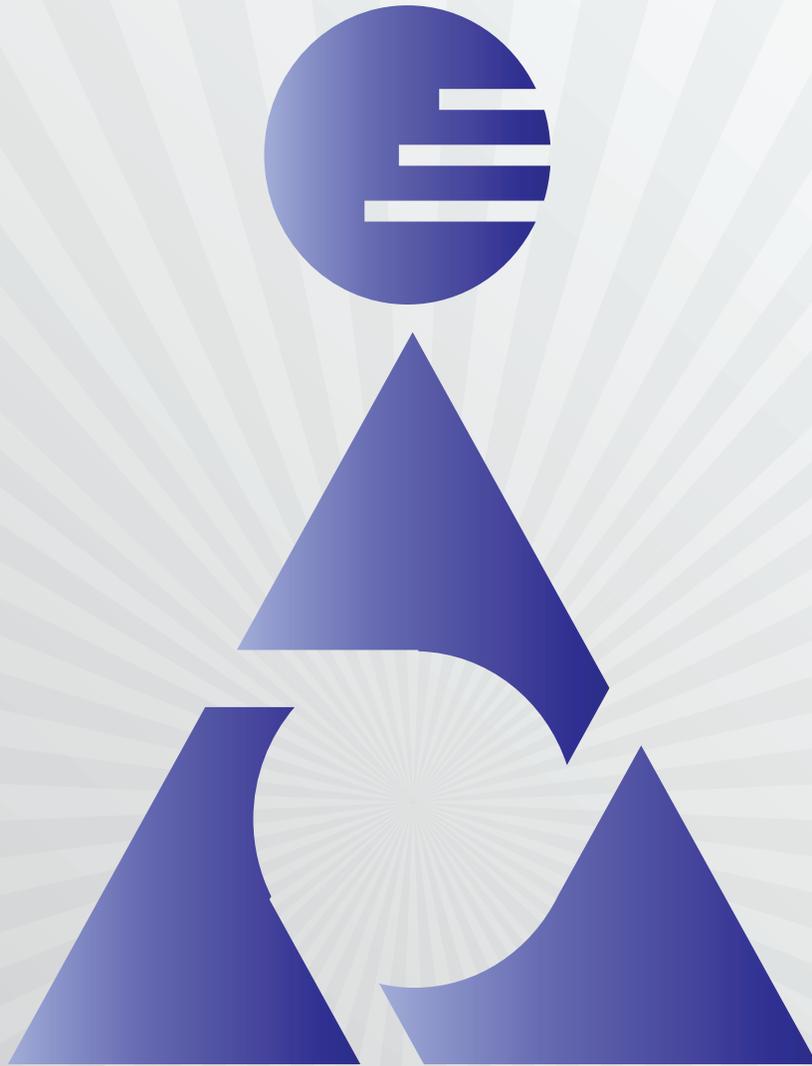


STRESSMASTER

***Stress Mastery Guide:
A Road Map To Resilience***





Disclaimer:

Regardless of your scores, if you are in acute distress or feel that life is hopeless, seek out a competent mental health professional immediately. This GUIDE is not intended to replace good quality medical and psychological assistance. If you need help, seek it out today! The materials provided by Stressmaster and Dr. James Petersen are for educational purposes only and not to be construed as providing a medical diagnosis or psychological services.

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STRESSMASTER is an international stress management consulting, training, and publishing company headquartered in Phoenix, AZ.

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ABOUT THE SMQ SCALES

The STRESSMASTERY GUIDE provides information on the meaning of each Stress Mastery Questionnaire (SMQ) scale along with WHAT TO KNOW and WHAT TO DO if you scored high on any given scale.

The SMQ is both a personal stress “risk” assessment and an educational tool that can help you to identify and understand your Stress Warning Signs, types of Stressors you are currently facing and the possible Effects of Stress on your health and well-being. The SMQ is comprised of 11 scales in three (3) separate stress categories; they are:

I - STRESS WARNING SIGN SCALES

The Stress Warning Sign Scales are the result of a validation study conducted and funded by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (Petersen, J. and Lawrence, H. NIOSH, 1982). The specific scales are:

Hostility/Anger (HO)

Perfectionism (PE)

Time-Urgency (TI)

Disappointment (DI)

Burnout (BR)

Underachievement (UA)

Tension (TE)

II - STRESS EFFECTS SCALES

The Stress Effects Scales shows how stress may be affecting you at both a physical and emotional level. The two scales are:

Physical Stress Effects (PE)

Life Work Satisfaction (LW)

III - STRESSOR SCALES

The Stressor Scales reflect the two major types of stressors that are known to be a cause or “trigger” of the stress response. The two scales are:

Life Events (LE)

Hassles (HA)

THE MEANING OF “RISK” SCORES

Each SMQ scale provides a view of one important aspect of stress and how it may be affecting you at this time. Your “Risk Level” relates to the possibility of having or developing stress-related physical, behavioral or emotional issues. Having a high score on any given scale indicates that you may be at “risk” of developing stress related problems, but it does not mean you will necessarily experience any problems. Use the concept of “risk” as a “warning sign” not as an absolute.

The SMQ is based upon a research and validation study conducted by Dr. James Petersen and Mr. Harry Lawrence through a grant from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. (NIOSH, 1982).

Each scales is normed and your scores are compared to the study group.



Based on your responses to the 87 SMQ questions, you were placed in a High, Medium-High, Medium, Medium-Low or Low “Risk” area for each of the 11 SMQ scales. The research showed that high to Medium High scores on one or more of the 7 Stress Warning Sign Scales are associated with such physical problems as: headaches, cardiovascular disease, digestion and bowel problems, or emotional issues like burnout or excessive tension. But some people score high but do not experience

any of these problems. There are many factors that can prevent or delay the development of stress related problems. Some of these factors will be explained later in this Guide.

A High or Medium High score on any of the SMQ scales is a warning to look more closely to determine what you can do to reduce or change your level of stress. A high or medium-high score on more than one of the Seven Stress Warning Sign Scales puts you at greater risk of developing stress-related problems. Everyone is different, so use this information to see if stress is causing you physical or emotional problems and make your own determination of what if anything you need to change.

A Medium score on any of the SMQ scales places you in a borderline situation. Check to see if stress is becoming a problem for you now. Determine if you could do more to improve your response to life’s stressors and daily hassles. If you have a positive attitude, feel in control of your life and have few health issues, you probably have low “risk”. However, if you feel that things are not improving in your life or work, are experiencing more stress than usual, or you do not feel in control of important situations, then begin to apply some of the techniques shared in the STRESSMASTERY GUIDE.

If your scores fall into the Medium-Low to Low on one or more scales, chances are you are doing better than most people and your stress response is not likely to be very high. Keep up the good work. However, be on the alert for the encroachment of stressors in your life and a deterioration of how well you are mastering those stressors. Your scores can change over time.

STRESS WARNING SIGNS

HOSTILITY/ANGER SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL _____

The Hostility/Anger Scale (HO) scale assesses the degree to which you are experiencing frustration and anger at this time. The research on anger and stress has been widely studied and results of hundreds of studies are clear...Anger is the number one behavioral factor most highly correlated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, myocardial infarction and high blood pressure. Other physical and behavioral stress problems are also known to be directly influenced by stress. For example, gastrointestinal or stomach problems have a high correlation with anger.



WHAT TO KNOW

A high level of anger is a strong behavioral predictor of early illness, disease and, possibly even death. This scale measures such things as irritability, anger, and impatience and is also one of the classic Type-A behaviors. If you scored medium to high on this scale, it may be wise to find more constructive and appropriate ways of dealing with your angry thoughts and, ultimately, how you interact with others.

Most anger is harmful and counterproductive; it undermines relationships and can result in both physical and emotional scars. Anger is most often expressed in the form of verbal abuse, such as the "putting-down" or yelling at a child, spouse or even a coworker when they do not meet your expectations or needs.

Anger is also revealed when someone physically hits or bullies a person. Physical abuse and bullying are all too often a common occurrence in homes, schools and workplaces. People die because someone has lost control of his or her temper and actually killed someone they loved. All too often we hear on the news about someone who exploded in "road rage" and killed a complete stranger.

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Anger is a way to control the actions and feelings of others through coercion. People often use anger as an emotional hammer to get what they want. While anger can be expressed directly by lashing out, it can also be shown indirectly through passive-aggressive behavior. With passive-aggressive behavior, individuals punish others by being belligerent, not responding, pouting or simply running away; this is emotional bondage that is, unfortunately, often ineffective at controlling others.

WHAT TO DO

Determine if the anger you feel is excessive or harmful to you or those around you. If anger has affected you and, possibly, your loved ones or friends, it may be time to develop new ways of thinking and behaving.

The key to controlling anger is learning to change your thoughts about the person or situation. When anger erupts, the first step is to recognize that you are, in fact, angry. Knowing that you are in an agitated "angry state" and possibly not in control of your words or actions, means it is time to STOP, THINK and RELAX. Force yourself to recognize there is a better way to deal with people who fail to meet your expectations.

FEAR DRIVES ANGER

Since fear is the engine that most often drives people to do such offensive things such as hit, yell or scream at someone, ask yourself, "What am I afraid of right now?" Chances are you are experiencing anxiety and fear that the person will not do what you expect. As a result, you may feel anxious when you are not in control and react disproportionately.

If anger is a challenge for you, recognize that the need to control others is often unrealistic and counter-productive. If anxiety about a situation or person is high, work to change or modify your thinking about that situation or individual. Once you do, you will be able to master your fear more effectively and your response to the stressor that irritates you will be much more appropriate and effective.

WORK ON "LETTING GO"

"Letting go" is the key to freeing yourself from excessive anger. Our culture teaches us to always take action and maintain control. While this approach is good in some situations, it is harmful when there is no real threat. By "letting go," you will actually gain control over your responses. When you do become aware of any excessive anger, aggression or hostility toward others, you can begin to talk to yourself in a more effective way.

Flow! Don't try to control fear, flow with it. The more you focus on fear...the more you get. Once you have recognized the fear behind your anger, you can give yourself permission to let it go. Doing so will allow the fear to flow through and then out of you. Energy is wasted trying to push away from our fears. Unfortunately, this keeps us smack in the middle of our fear and anxiety. Accept that the feared condition has occurred and take positive steps to change or make the best of the situation.

BUILD YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Most people experience some frustration and anger from time to time. It is normal. However, a positive and productive expression of that anger is essential. A good sense of self-esteem or self-worth will enable you to express anger and frustration in a more effective way.

When self-esteem improves, it is possible to accept others for who they are and to resist the use of anger to get your way. For example, you might say to yourself:

"I can let go and it's OK.
Letting go does not mean I'm out of control."

"I can let go and still feel in control."

"Letting go makes me feel better.
That will make the situation better."

"I don't need anger to change
this person or situation at this time."

"Anger is not controlling me,
I am the master of my anger."

"I'm not an angry person. ANGER is
destructive.

I will raise myself above this anger and LET
GO."

BE PREPARED FOR ANGER

Get prepared for anger—it is going to happen. Think about when you get angry. Who do you get angry with and why? Write down or make a mental note of when you feel anger or express it either outwardly toward others or inwardly toward yourself. By becoming aware of the circumstances that trigger anger you will be better prepared to STOP ANGER,

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Re-think how you will respond differently when others do not live up to your expectations. You may not always succeed, but if you make the effort you will make progress. Look for small successes and reward yourself for progress.

USE "I-MESSAGES"

"I-Messages" are effective ways to communicate with others and can defuse a potentially explosive situation. Use "I-Messages" as alternatives to screaming and yelling. "I-Messages" take the form of telling the person how you feel because of what they did or did not do. "I-Messages" focus on behavior, not the person as a human being. For example, a common anger expression might be: "You idiot! Where have you been? You said you'd be home by 10 and here it is midnight. You're a stupid, no good kid. Get out of my sight."

An "I-Message" alternative would be: "When you don't call me or let me know when you're coming home, I feel you may have been hurt. I was worried about you. It is important for you to call me. I know you want to be independent, but let's discuss boundaries and limits. I don't hate you. I'm upset with your behavior." "I-Messages" should express how you are affected by another's behavior.

SET REALISTIC GOALS

Sometimes when we get angry at our own lack of progress, that anger is reflected or redirected at others. When we do not reach our goals, desires and hopes, frustration and feeling anger can be the result. By setting realistic goals for yourself, you will feel better and less frustrated. The net result is that you become a better person to those around you. Finally, when you see even small successes, tell yourself that you are making progress and be sure to reassure yourself that you are making progress.

AVOID "SHOULD'S"

Setting high expectations for yourself or others is a problem that can lead to stress and even more anger. You know you are setting unrealistic expectations when you find yourself frequently saying that people should be or do something other than what they are actually capable of.

Engaging in these "shouldisms" is often self-destructive and usually harmful to your relationships with others. Examples of "shouldisms" are:

"She/he should be more loving."

"When I walk into a room, people should immediately say hello to me."

"When I assigned her the job, she should have completed it right away."

"They should show me more respect. After all, I'm their superior. I deserve it."

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STRESS WARNING SIGNS

PERFECTIONISM SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL _____

The Perfectionism Scale assesses the need to think and behave in perfectionistic ways toward yourself and others. Perfectionism is not the same as working to achieve excellence – it is the constant quest for unobtainable and the repeated setting of unrealistic goals, standards and expectations. The net result is stress, both internally as well as externally with coworkers, family and friends.



WHAT TO KNOW

A high score on the Perfectionism Scale is correlated with chronic health and emotional problems and is an important stress warning sign. Individuals caught up in perfectionist thinking and behavior can experience significant personal distress, accompanied by physical and emotional problems. Their unrealistically high standards and quest to avoid failure can also produce strong negative responses from others who may not share the same values or standards. If you scored high or medium on the Perfectionism Scale, recognize that your perfectionism may be damaging to your health and quality of life.

Perfectionism is a learned behavior. It is the result of years of external (imposed by others) and internal (self-imposed) pressure to improve one's own performance. Perfectionistic thinking is based on the unrealistic belief that, "Unless I am perfect, I am not okay." Perfectionists believe they cannot be happy unless they are perfect. Over time, this can increase the stress response and cause health and social problems.

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WHAT TO DO

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Perfectionism is not the same as making a conscientious effort to do your personal best. Seeking excellence is a realistic goal that generates a feeling of personal satisfaction. Perfectionists, however, set the bar so high that their expectations are not achievable. The result is stress due to unfulfilled expectations.

Perfectionists should re-evaluate and readjust their expectations for themselves, as well as for others who do not meet their needs. Most perfectionists set extremely high standards for themselves and others. Setting high standards is not the problem. Setting standards that cannot be realistically attained can be emotionally damaging to you as well as to others.

Perfectionists strive to be organized and on top of every detail and, regardless of their level of achievement, they come away feeling they have fallen short of their goal. Perfection is illusive, and generally speaking, unattainable. The net effect is an overwhelming and continuous sense of disappointment and unhappiness.

Determine if you are doing too much, for too many and in too short a time period. Ask: "Am I expect too much from others, particularly those close to me?. Perhaps you have expectations for a child, coworkers, boss, or your spouse that are unreasonable. Goals that "stretch" people are fine and desirable. Goals that "break" people create stress.

MASTER FEAR OF FAILURE

Since fear of failure motivates the perfectionist, one should ask: "What is the worst thing that could happen if I didn't do this task perfectly? What if I am not perceived as being perfect?" Generally, the answer to these questions is not as dire as one might imagine. People will not reject you or think less of you if things are not perfect. The imagined consequences are typically greater than reality.

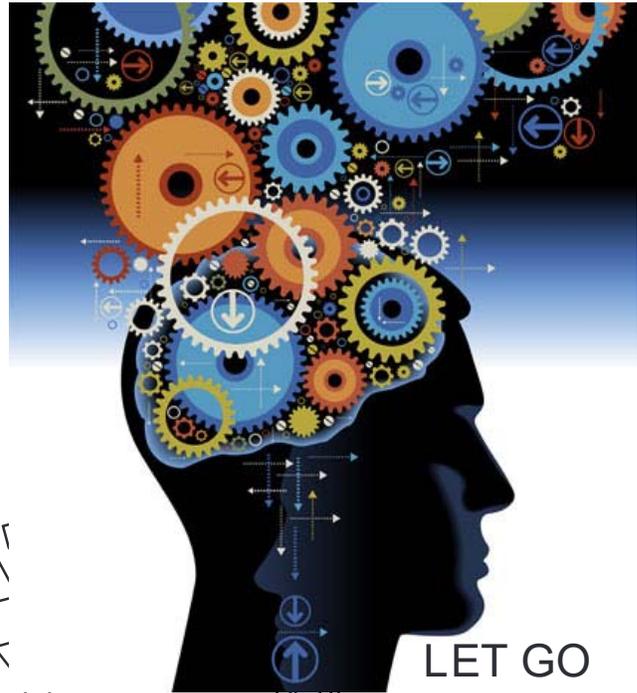
EXCELLENCE NOT PERFECTION

Practice leaving some things undone or less "perfect" than your normal performance. Most things can wait a day or two. Distinguish between life's essentials and nonessentials, so you know where to place your time and energy. Misplaced effort results in disappointment. Some tasks need to be done very well; others can be done less perfectly or even haphazardly. Strive for excellence only when excellence is required; be perfectionistic only when perfectionism is really achievable.

ACCEPT WHAT COMES, THEN IMPROVE

Not reaching your goals does not mean you are a failure. Failure is relative to your ideals and expectations. Keeping standards reasonable does not mean you will necessarily develop an ineffective program, product or that you might produce less. It is well known that many people only succeed after repeated "failures". For many, it can actually contribute to their eventual success.

Focus on "letting go." There is a time to turn off the computer, put the pen down, turn the phone off and call it a day. When you let go, stress will flow away from you. The result is that you actually feel better and become more relaxed.



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Perfectionists often do not know their needs or how to meet them. When you stop and take time for yourself, your deeper needs will begin to rise into your awareness. To fulfill those deeper needs, you must fight the mental tapes that you unconsciously say to yourself such as: "Do more, be better, work harder and never stop."

Try talking to yourself in a kinder and more positive way. For example, use words that reassure yourself such as, "I am a good person. I did the best that I can do. I can rest now. I do not need to be perfect in everything I do. I will let go of all unrealistic expectations and do something just for myself."

We all use self-talk to direct our behaviors and actions. Changing your self-talk and using new and more positive words will make a difference in how you feel. Make the phrase, "Let it go", become an integral part of your thinking and stress will automatically dissipate.

STRESS WARNING SIGNS

TIME-URGENCY SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL _____

Today more people than ever are in a great rush to move faster, work harder and do more in less time. While a “go get ‘em” attitude can be the spark which makes great things happen, an excessive amount of Time-Urgency can cause personal stress. With the explosion in information technology, constant text messaging and e-mailing, living each day attached to your “smart” phone, the external and internal pressure we place upon ourselves to do more and to do it quicker is causing increased physical and emotional stress problems.



WHAT TO KNOW

Time-Urgency is a result of several factors including unrealistic expectations, poor time management and procrastination. The term Time Management is a bit confusing...we really don't manage time...we manage ourselves with respect to time. If you are good at slowing down a bit, living in the moment and recognize that not everything should be done in a rush...your sense of Time-Urgency will be reduced and so will your stress.

The key is to develop solid time mastery skills that will enable you to “walk” not “run” through life. If you score medium to high on this scale, slow down and take life and events as they are and not as you think they should be. Learn to manage your time and you will help defeat this negative thinking.

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WHAT TO DO
MAKE TIME YOUR FRIEND

Excessive Time-Urgency is a classic component of the Type-A personality characteristics. Individuals who are in a constant state of Time-Urgency have a higher risk of physical problems like cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and other health problems than those who work at a more relaxed and steady pace. In effect, excessive Time-Urgency keeps the stress response in high gear which has a direct impact on one's overall level of stress,

Time can be your enemy or your friend. When time is your friend, you take a more relaxed approach to work and play. If you make time your enemy, you see time being drained away and your anxiety increased.

Individuals who constantly perceive life in a time-urgent way tend to worry excessively about schedules, set overly-tight deadlines, rush when rushing is not necessary and constantly multi-task. These self-defeating behaviors and thoughts create stress and rob you from enjoyment in your work and play.

Time-Urgency is a perception problem. Everyone has some time pressure to get things done, meet occasional tight deadlines, and have places to go. This behavior is now common in our accelerated society. When you place everything under time pressure, stress erupts. Re-think your view of time. Ask: “Does my sense of time-urgency reflect what is really important to me?” Putting events and tasks in their perspective will make a big difference in how you feel and how well you function.



SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

Practice doing some things slowly. Not all tasks need to be done quickly. Take a child's view in which tasks are done in the time it takes to do them. When you are talking with people, LISTEN more than you talk. Little is learned when we do the talking. By listening more and talking less you slow down and actually hear what the other person is saying. Under stress, our ability to interpret what a person is saying is reduced. Quiet listening reduces stress.

GET ORGANIZED

Lack of organization in the home or office is a major contributor to causing Time-Urgency to even exist. One key problem that leads to delays is an inability to find important documents, files or items that are needed. When they are not available and time runs short, the fear of failure or being late (rejection) crops up. The result that follows is always being late or rushing to an appointment.

SEPARATE WORK FROM PLAY

Keep work and play separate. Work does have more time requirements than play. Don't apply the requirements of work to your social gatherings. Think about it... do you behave as though social activities are board meetings?

BE A GOOD PLANNER

Rushing around may indicate a deeper problem such as poor planning skills. Do you know which things are more important than others? Do you fall into the trap of "failing to plan" and then wind up rushing at the last minute to get the job done? Evaluate your planning and organizing skills to see if you can reduce the stress caused by poor planning.

CHANGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Expecting that you must always do more and do it faster is at the root of a Time-Urgency problem. Determine if you are trying to do more than you are reasonably capable of doing. Focus on one thing at a time. Try to keep expectations of yourself and others in-line with reality. Since negative "self-talk" and improper expectations are the cause of your stress, learn to constantly check what you are expecting of yourself and others. Ask yourself, "Is this a reasonable and realistic expectation?" If not, change your expectation. If your expectation is realistic, then go forward with the task

MASTER YOUR FEAR OF REJECTION

Many people operating in the "hurry mode" fear rejection and disapproval. Trying to please everyone by rushing to meet "their" needs is the problem. If you must make all your appointments on time or, if you must never be late, you may have an excessive need to please others. Ask yourself, "If I fail to live up to someone's expectations, what's the worst that could happen?"

TIMELINESS, NOT TIME-URGENCY

Being on time is necessary for most situations and meetings. However, while it is important to be on time for most appointments, not all require a "do-or-die" attitude. It really is not necessary to rush through traffic, risking life and limb, just to avoid being late. So, take the foot off the gas, take a deep breath and relax. All will be well.

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STRESS WARNING SIGNS

DISAPPOINTMENT SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL _____

Research has shown that those who scored high on the Disappointment (DI) Scale had a greater frequency of physical or emotional difficulties than those who scored low. Individuals who experience a high level of disappointment tend to have more headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties, moist palms, over-perspiration and other physical problems than those scoring low on this scale.



WHAT TO KNOW

Disappointment relates to what you expect from others, from yourself or from life in general. Some disappointment is unavoidable, while at other times it is preventable or, at least, somewhat avoidable. Disappointment that is unavoidable includes events such as a decrease in business revenue through no fault your own, getting laid off because of a decline in business or having good friends being forced to relocate. Very little can be done to prevent these stressors from occurring; they just happen.

Disappointment is a result of thinking negatively of others because they do not meet your expectations. People who score high on this scale have difficulty setting realistic expectations for others and typically resist changing their expectations to be more in-line with reality. Their attitude is: "This is what I expect and nothing else will do."



Even if you think your expectations are appropriate and realistic, they may not be. For example, you call a friend several times and she does not reciprocate and call you back. You allow yourself to become upset, angry or, possibly sad. Consequently, you "write her off" as a friend. However, the reality may be quite different. She may want to call but is overworked, out-of-town or simply overwhelmed with her personal life. Perhaps she is not time-oriented and forgets or fails to do what she knows she should do, not because she dislikes you, but because of her nature. To reduce your stress, you can either accept her as is, or adjust your thinking to make the relationship work as it is...not how you wish it to be.

All of us experience disappointment to some extent; however, some of us are more prone to feeling disappointed when our expectations are not met by the people around us. Feeling repeatedly disappointed is a result of a pattern of faulty or irrational thinking about the person or situation. If you experience frequent disappointment, evaluate your expectations and, if necessary, you may need to alter or lower them to be more in-line with what is actually possible.

WHAT TO DO

ASK: "IS THE STRESSOR AVOIDABLE?"

If you learn to differentiate between avoidable and unavoidable stressors, you will have greater control over how you respond and, consequently, you will be able to reduce personal discouragement, disappointment and stress. Focus on changing an event that is, indeed, changeable. One way to reduce your disappointment is to create realistic expectations from the beginning. Realize that faulty thinking may be at the heart of your excessive disappointment and work to understand that what you think affects how you feel.

Remember, the only control you have is the control you place on your own thinking, not the attitudes and behaviors of others. We can influence, ask, request, even demand, but ultimately, you control only YOU and no one else.

CHANGE EXPECTATIONS

Expectations play the central role in disappointment and the resulting stress. Evaluate what you expect from family, friends, coworkers and volunteers. What do you expect from life, God, your spouse, coworkers or your children? Mentally check to see if your expectations are reasonable and achievable. If not, you may need to change or alter your expectations. However, if your expectations are reasonable, then go with them.



REDIRECT YOUR THINKING

Your thinking determines your expectations. The good news is that thinking is controllable. Keep in mind that while you have some control over your thoughts, you have no control over the thoughts or action of others.

Determine if your disappointment is specific to one person or situation or to most aspects of your life. This will allow you to focus your energies more effectively. Write down specific disappointments or examples of disappointment and look for the cause, not just the symptom of your stress.

Direct your thoughts away from the concern you have with the people who are not meeting your hopes and desires. If someone consistently cannot or will not give you what you want, you have some choices: i.e., accept the person as he or she is at this moment or choose to limit your time with them or dependency on them. Make this kind of decision with care.

Ask someone close to you if they think your expectations are out-of-line with what is reasonable. They may have a better, or at least a different, perspective than you. Listen to what they say. "If the shoe fits," it is up to you to make the necessary change.

COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY

When you think about it, you have little or no control over the actions of others. You can, however, have some influence over people through good and clear communication. You will have better success in getting people to change or do what you desire by employing better communication and effective listening techniques.

LEARN TO LISTEN BETTER

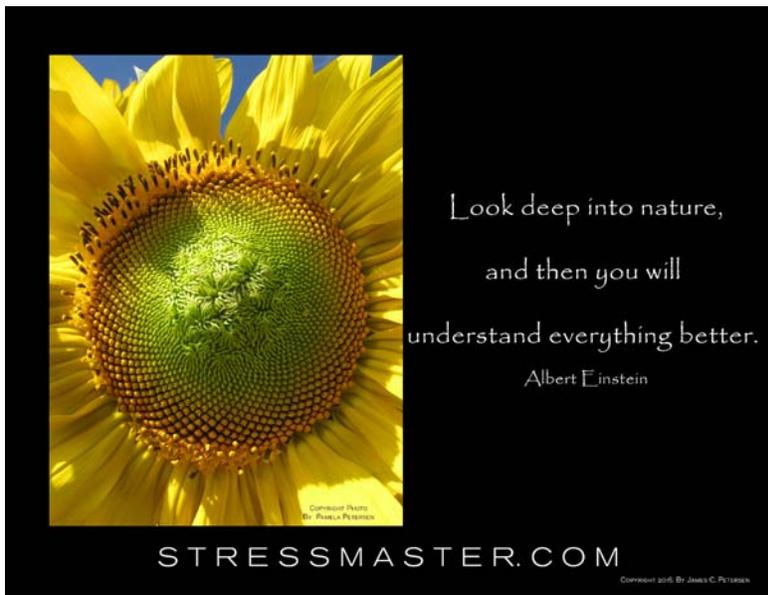
Listen actively and listen more to what others are really trying to communicate. By understanding the person, your expectations become more realistic and achievable. You will also feel much better and reduce your stress response. Plus, you may see some changes in his or her behavior and attitude.

STOP DWELLING!

Dwelling on a disappointment is "mental obsession." It does not change a person or what they may have done or not done. Being preoccupied with a person who does not meet your needs creates unnecessary stress. When you catch yourself thinking excessively about a recent disappointment, redirect and focus back on letting go and accepting that person for who they are. Being "in the moment" is the key to nurturing a positive view of the situation and that will help you feel better. The first step to thinking clearly is to lower your stress levels. Anxiety and fear interferes with rational thinking. Do some deep breathing, take a slow relaxed walk, sit back and focus on the moment...then begin to redirect your thoughts.

One of the most effective communication tools involves stating what you want from someone and then asking that person to restate what you said to see if they understood you. Simply asking for the person to restate what you said will ensure that your message got through. They may choose to ignore or not do what you ask, but at least they know exactly what you want and expect.

In turn, you can use the same technique when someone expresses their desires and expectations of you. Start with "If I understand you correctly, what you are saying is..." This is a simple but powerful tool. Ultimately, you can reduce or eliminate disappointment through better clarification of what is being said and heard.



STRESS WARNING SIGNS

BURNOUT SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL _____

Frequent periods of negative moods are a clear stress warning sign. Individuals who scored high on the Burnout (BR) Scale are likely to experience greater stress than those who scored low. If you scored medium to high on this scale, evaluate what you are thinking and what is the source of how you feel. Is your thinking positive or negative? Do you frequently think about the worst of situations, people or yourself? Are your thoughts mostly negative and do you feel down? The key to feeling better is to make changes in how you view yourself and the world around you. Keep in mind that Burnout is not the same as depression or, even, manic-depression. These are clinical conditions that require competent professional attention from a psychologist or mental health professional.



WHAT TO KNOW

People whose life is filled with both major life changes and a large amount of daily hassles often become “burned-out” and discouraged. Some burnout is normal. Most of us experience it. When burnout occurs frequently or with intensity, focus on finding ways to reverse the negative thinking which generates and maintains these moods.

Periods of negative mood or feeling burnout may be an indication that stress is having an effect on your body, mind and quality of your life. Recent research has shown that individuals experiencing burnout experience changes in the frequency and amount of stress hormones, such as cortisol, in their bodies. These hormones can produce feelings of being down and “lifeless”. The more you feel this way, the greater the stress.

As with most stress “coping” mechanisms, burnout is the result of prolonged periods of hassles and major life events that lead to increasingly negative thoughts and perceptions about oneself and the world in general.

Frequent occurrences of negative mood indicate that stress is affecting you detrimentally. You may be experiencing personal burnout. You may also be trying to communicate with others in an indirect way that you are unhappy with yourself, them or life in general. Showing the world how bad you feel may be a plea for help. Unfortunately, those around you may not be able to interpret your moods, nor know what to do to help you or the situation.

Some negative mood may not be avoidable. Occasional “down” times may have a cleansing effect, for example, after being rejected for a new position, you feel hurt and “blue”. This is a normal reaction to your “perceived” failure. As you work through those moments, you will realize that there are things you can do to improve the situation such as: move, apply for another position, or simply talk to key people in your organization about what you can do to improve your skills and eligibility for advancement or change. Your mood lifts and you feel more in control.