

LMI Journal



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Finding Balance to Prevent Burnout

By Paul J. Meyer

Leadership can be stressful. But effective leaders use stress as a constructive force rather than allowing it to become a destructive one. Stress occurs when conditions produce awareness that some action is required to satisfy a need, to solve a problem, or to prevent some undesirable result. Without constructive stress, motivation would be at an extremely low level, and very little would ever be accomplished. Adopt the attitude that stress is a challenge to your creativity – a welcome opportunity to perform well. Adjust your language to reflect this attitude. Constructive stress inspires people to act, to achieve, and to utilize more of their full potential for success.

Stress becomes destructive when the pressure to act cannot be met, or when one believes it cannot be met. If the perceived need to act requires more time, more money, greater skill or productivity than the individual can supply, the force of stress becomes negative. The result is physical or psychological damage – or both. Stress activates primitive emotions and increases body functions to meet a threat. If strenuous physical activity follows, the body returns to normal as soon as the need has been met and no further threat exists. But if the perceived threat is not eliminated by these activities, the body continues to prepare itself for



meeting additional threat until a point of physical exhaustion is reached. All sorts of physical damage and ailments occur as a consequence of a continuous state of stress.

Even more damaging than the physical toll of stress are the psychological effects. Continuing stress that cannot be satisfied by a reasonable level of activity shortens tempers and frays nerves. It destroys the thrill and excitement of achievement because no accomplishment ever seems good enough. The resulting dissatisfaction with personal productivity causes a breakdown in relationships with people at work and at home. Undue stress hampers decision-making effectiveness, decreases personal productivity, and blocks creativity.

Preventing Burnout

Unless you handle stress constructively, burnout is likely. Burnout is brought about by unrelieved work stress and results in extreme emotional exhaustion and dramatically decreased productivity. Prevention, of course, is the preferred way of handling burnout. And, it is just as vital to prevent burnout in your people as it is for yourself. Effective leaders are positive role models; they handle stress constructively to prevent burnout.

Identify specific sources of stress, then plan and carry out appropriate actions to minimize or eliminate them. Common sources of stress include: • work overload • excessive

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time demands • unanticipated or unrealistic assignments or deadlines • interpersonal conflicts.

Involving your team members in the goal-setting process helps reduce uncertainties. Role conflicts are reduced by clear definition of roles and responsibilities. Changing job assignments sometimes helps. Team member input helps you make decisions about the most appropriate way to reduce stress. Encouraging the participation of team members in decisions that affect their day-to-day work lives and delegating authority appropriately also reduce stress levels.

When team members perceive that those in leadership positions care about them, they experience less stress. Provide emotional support by paying attention to the concerns of your team members. Engage in information-gathering conversations with team members who appear to be experiencing destructive stress. Use the information you gain to help them successfully cope with performance expectations and pressures.

A variety of programs can be devised to prevent and reduce the stress experienced by employees. Some of the most effective programs include these: • wellness programs • physical fitness facilities • leadership training • group decision making • counseling • job redesign • flexible time off or varying working hours • career development activities. Each of these programs can become part of a growing preventive approach in which employee stress is reduced.

Keeping Your Perspective

If you spend the extra time you gain by setting priorities and by delegating in even more frantic attempts to work harder and move faster, you may quickly return to the same old pattern of excess stress. Remember why you made the effort to clear out the stress-producing mind clutter of old attitudes, old work habits, and old problems. Strive to enhance your enjoyment of life and your productivity by keeping all areas of your personal and business life in proper perspective and balance:

1. Family and Home – Make your family life more rewarding by investing some of the energy you save through better organization at work. Maintain meaningful relationships with all members of your family. Exhibit the same caring for them that you do for the members of your work team.
2. Financial and Career – Exercise careful watch over your personal financial affairs. Give attention to your own career growth and your ultimate career goals. Con-

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tinue to focus on career goals. They provide you with the income, the influence and the sense of achievement that make it possible for you to achieve your goals in other areas of life.

3. Mental and Educational – Continue to learn about your career field and of the world in general. Read something every day to stimulate thinking about important ideas.
4. Physical and Health – Supplement the physical benefits of removing stress from your daily life by adding other positive factors such as a sensible exercise program, a healthful diet, and adequate rest. A healthy body supports an active and creative mind, lengthens life, and enhances the quality of life.
5. Social and Cultural – Your relationships with people make life worthwhile. Develop a broad circle of friends with whom you share mutual interests. Invest some of your time and effort in making society better for everyone.
6. Spiritual and Ethical – Give attention to becoming the kind of person you want to be and to the values you want to demonstrate in your life. Give back to others some of the rewards and blessings of life that you have received. Find some cause greater than yourself that you can support with your time, money, and influence.

Your personal goals program is your best ally in preventing and relieving stress in every area of life. It gives you these strengths: • an overall life purpose • a clear statement of values and priorities • crystallized goals • written plans with deadlines for their achievement • a plan for tracking progress and staying on course • an active system of motivational support through affirmation and visualization

Once your goals program is moving forward, a few minutes each week allows you to check on scheduled action for the week to come and note needed activities in your calendar. Additional time, perhaps each quarter, serves as a check on progress. The annual checkup provides a long-range view that lets you set new goals and coordinate your plans with those of your family and your team members. Your goals program prevents stress because you are always prepared for any situation.

Live Up to Your Truest Self

The most successful communicators succeed by developing their own potential, not by trying to imitate others. Being authentic involves being your best, truest self — warm, open, and human.

Authenticity creates a climate of trust because it promises others the freedom to act without a need to build protective walls. This positive atmosphere establishes rapport, cements relationships, and enhances communication.

A realistic grasp of their own capabilities and a recognition of their limitations is another trait common to authentic communicators.

Accurate self-assessment of your personality in general and of your specific communication skills is invaluable. When you know your strengths, you know how to capitalize on them; and when you acknowledge your weaknesses, you can work on them.

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The Power of Teamwork

Examples of the power of teamwork can be seen everywhere. In nature, for example, large flocks of geese fly thousands of miles to their destination as the seasons change. These flocks are made up of hundreds of individual birds with limited capabilities to go the distance alone, but somehow nearly all of them make it to their destination. How do they do it? The answer is simple: teamwork. One bird serves as leader while the others fly in formation to minimize wind resistance for the birds behind them. When the lead bird tires, he rotates to another position so a different bird assumes the responsibility of leading the flock. If each individual bird decided to make this long journey by itself, most – if not all – undoubtedly would fail. In contrast, when all the birds work together as a flock – as a team – they reach their goal and arrive at their final destination.

Birds also demonstrate another important aspect of effective teamwork. Have you ever noticed how a bird by itself may not be particularly energetic whereas when a number of birds get together they seem to energize each other. This phenomenon can be considered an example of synergy, a concept closely related to teamwork. Simply put, synergy is the action of two or more elements to achieve a result greater than they would achieve individually. This phenomenon is true with humans as well as in the animal kingdom.



Another way to define synergy is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. In other words, $1 + 1 = 3$ or 4 or more. When team members cooperate and work together, they can always do more than if any one team member tried to accomplish the same goal alone. Engineers have learned that when geese fly in formation, each bird, by flapping its wings, creates an uplift for the bird that follows. Together the whole flock can fly over 70 percent further than if they fly alone. Now that's synergy!

Perhaps the most obvious examples of teamwork – and synergy – can be found in athletics where teams driven by enthusiastic teamwork usually win, while a lack of synergy and teamwork generally results in losing. Even some sports normally considered individual sports require the efforts of a team. Consider the most famous cycling race of all, the Tour de France. Lance Armstrong praises all his team members for making these victories possible. Various cyclists serve in different positions as they and Armstrong speed away on the predetermined route to each day's destination in this grueling 21-day race. Supporting the cyclists are the ground crew, the communications team, and other teams that enable the cyclists to be better than their competitors.

Lance Armstrong sums up the power of effective teamwork in any endeavor this way, "No one wins alone."

Utilize Writing Skills to Communicate

The importance of writing clearly and persuasively has not diminished with time or with advances in communication technology. In fact, effective writing maximizes the use of all business communication methods – faxes, teleconferencing, voice mail, E-mail, multimedia, text messaging – all the latest communication innovations.

International business makes it necessary to communicate with people in widely separated locations, and writing is often the best method for getting the message across. While face-to-face conversation is generally the most effective way to communicate, for some communication needs, writing is the method of choice.

Written communication often substitutes when the situation prevents personal contact. But at other times writing is even more effective than spoken words. When do you “put it in writing?”

- *To save time* – Writing saves time by reducing the need for time-consuming meetings. A memo directed to several people provides information that can be read much more quickly than those people could be gathered for a meeting. Writing also saves time when you use it to tell people ahead of time what will be done at a meeting and what each person is responsible for preparing before the meeting.

E-mail communication is ideal for this purpose. Meeting agendas can be attached to the e-mail and auto-replies can be generated to show receipt of a message. If the meeting is mandatory, a paper memo can be sent to reinforce the importance of attendance, but in today’s electronic savvy world, most people will have already entered the meeting date on their electronic calendar to alert them of the impending meeting.

When you find yourself writing similar letters or memos to different people over time, keep copies of paragraphs you use frequently. With slight modification, you can use them again – and save time that can be invested in other important work. One word of caution: Using standard paragraphs allows you to save time and to use effective, clear wording many times for maximum benefit; yet you must be careful to re-read and evaluate the wording for each situation. Modifying and rearranging standard wording adds the personal touch necessary to communicate effectively in this high-tech age.

- *To crystallize thought* – Writing crystallizes thought and crystallized thought motivates action. When you put

your ideas in writing, you refine them. Seeing ideas in “black and white” allows you to throw out the bad and develop the good. You create the opportunity to see any flaws and strengthen your message through choosing just the right words to elicit the results you desire. Putting your ideas into writing helps you have concise, coherent conversations with people, and prepares you for writing effective correspondence.

- *To remind* – Written plans of action serve as a reminder of what needs to be done, who is responsible, and when the action should be completed. People quickly and easily

forget the content of verbal communication, but written communication provides a lasting record of agreements and decisions. Putting something in writing tends to make it more “official” and is a tangible reminder. A written plan facilitates “getting things done;” accountability, recorded in writing, always increases productivity.

- *To prevent misunderstanding* – Putting important information in writing avoids misunderstandings. People can read and re-read directions or instructions or important information when it is at their fingertips in “black and white.” After important conversations or meetings on important policies and procedures, always recap in writing what was decided.

After you consider the reaction of the person receiving your communication, you may conclude that writing your message is not the best way to ensure the desired reception of your message; a face-to-face conversation may be better. Experience seems to emphasize that bad news or reprimands or efforts to discipline should be hand delivered, or dealt with in person. The nature of the news or reprimand, the personality of the prospective recipient, the relationship between you and that recipient, and various other factors need to be considered in making this decision. Reviewing the goal of communication may help you make the right decision.

Just remember that written words stay on paper much longer than spoken words hang in the air. Carelessly written messages – especially ones containing sensitive information – may return to haunt you and your career. When writing from a disciplinary or authoritative position, give the project the necessary planning and careful attention it deserves.

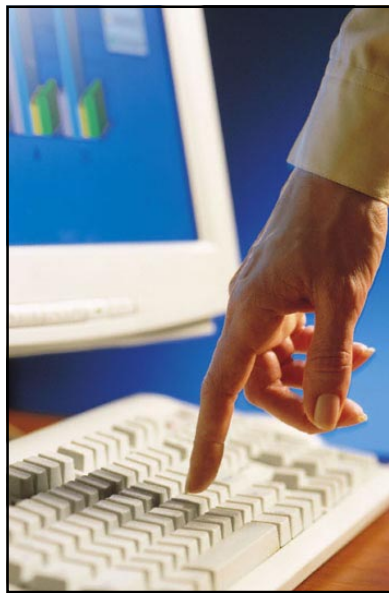


Figure in the Emotional Factor

Coping with changes or challenging situations generates strong emotions. Whenever a problem arises, there is an accompanying threat: the threat of losing something you already have, or the threat of failing to gain something you are trying to obtain. Loss of anything important to you is felt as a threat either to your physical or emotional security. The normal reaction is fear. Fear is a primitive emotion placed in us for our protection. It triggers a number of bodily changes to meet the increased physical demands of “flight or fight” — the natural response to a threat.

But when the danger of loss is not physical, the adrenaline, the increased breathing and heart rate, and accompanying metabolic changes tend to be used up in emotional release instead. A problem may be perceived as a threat of loss of profit, failure to reach a goal, disruption of the smooth working of the organization, or even loss of respect for one’s ability to lead. Since running away to escape the danger and physical fighting are not considered appropriate in our society, the fear of loss is turned to an emotional reaction — anger. Unless the anger is addressed, problem solving cannot proceed. If anger is repressed or ignored, the emotional energy is forced inward and turns to depression. For your own mental health and that of others around you, commit yourself today to handle anger as constructively as you can.

When you feel anger directed toward someone, especially when you need to work with that person toward mutual goals, ask yourself what loss you are afraid of suffering. When you can identify the loss that is causing the fear and anger, you can decide how likely and how serious it is. Sometimes you realize it is of no real importance and not worth the anger it is generating. Only when needed results are threatened is it time to take action.

If you perceive a potentially explosive situation is developing between you and others, or that others are angry or defensive, open up communication by asking questions. Effective, tactful questions reveal the underlying assumptions and needs contributing to the anger. Carefully chosen questions also allow you to begin to understand the thinking of others, build trust, and enable you to move together toward mutual understanding of the problem. Here are a few examples of questions that disarm the emotional explosives and produce constructive solutions:

“What do you think is causing this situation?”

“What do we know and don’t know for a fact?”

“What have you considered doing about this?”

“What can you do, and what are you willing to do about this problem?”

When you see that a situation is developing into a crisis and must be addressed, approach it calmly. You will accomplish more by keeping your emotions under control. Refuse

to allow fear to control you because fear and anger alienate others and destroy your own creativity, blocking the pathway to progress. Invite others to join you in “attacking” the problem and “destroying” its bad effects. Then you can develop a “battle plan” and “deploy your forces” to “head off the enemy.” Using these “fighting” terms helps you satisfy the inner urge to fight the threatening force, but you are able to direct the physical energy into productive goals. When you stay calm and in control, others follow your lead. Then you can communicate, take constructive actions, and begin solving the problem.

Whatever happens in your efforts to make needed adjustments, cope with

change, and handle negative situations, resolve now to uphold the highest ethical standards and principles in every interaction with others. Well-intentioned people sometimes under the stress of conflict do or say things that damage reputations, make permanent enemies, or do irreparable damage to the self esteem and confidence of others. Decide beforehand that you will always act according to your ethical standards, striving to build up others and motivate them to their full potential. Then be tolerant and understanding of those who have not yet reached that level of personal growth. When someone gives way to emotion, decide now that your response will be a question to yourself, “What are the communication skills I need to use in this situation to help create an opportunity for this person to grow and develop?”

Emotions give your personality force and color. Make your emotions work positively for you. Use their intensity to communicate your caring, understanding, and empathy. Use the energy that emotions generate to work toward important goals. Your actions then communicate your strength and maturity to others. They are then more likely to follow your lead in moving forward toward the achievement of professional and personal goals.



Understanding Yourself to Motivate Others

Your individual style affects your communication with others. What you know about yourself and how you feel about yourself determine to a great extent your attitudes toward others and how you relate to them and communicate with them. Lack of awareness of your own feelings and attitudes may be thwarting the accomplishment of your goals in your career, in your family, and with friends. Increased awareness of your own feelings and what motivates you inevitably helps you communicate more constructively to reach your goals.

What Motivates People

The goal of communication is mutual understanding by sender and receiver, and some change – in an attitude or action, or in both. Mutual understanding depends on understanding oneself and understanding others. When you know what motivates people, you can communicate more effectively with them to help them reach their goals and to help you reach yours. Human beings are complicated, and no simplistic rules exist for understanding what causes them to behave as they do. But insight into motivation helps you build bridges of understanding.

Three basic principles provide insight into why people behave in certain ways.

Principle #1. Behavior is caused. People are motivated for two basic reasons: either to gain a benefit or to avoid a loss. Understanding more fully why people move either toward certain behavior to gain a benefit or move away from certain behavior to avoid a loss can help you interact more effectively with them.

Motivation is a “motive” for “action.” A motive is a reason, purpose, or goal; an action is to go, do, or act. Motivation is both motive and action combined: goal directed action. When someone sets a goal and starts working toward it, that person is motivated. In the truest sense of the word, you cannot motivate someone else; you can only create an environment conducive to motivation.

Too many people try to use fear motivation, based on force, or incentive motivation, based on external reward, to get people to do what they want done. Fear and incentive motivation are only temporary because they involve non-personal, external needs only. Also, external fear and incentive tactics do not help individuals develop and use their innate talents and abilities. The only permanent mo-

tivation is attitude motivation, based on inward change. When people do something because they want to, not because they think they have to, when they are pursuing their own goals, then and only then are they truly motivated. Lasting motivation taps into the minds and hearts of others – not just their pocketbooks or their fears.

Principle #2. People are more likely to act on feelings or emotions than on logic. Regardless of how people arrive at certain judgments or beliefs, they are moved to action by feelings or emotions much more than by logic. Feelings play a more significant role in human behavior than most people recognize. In addition, feelings are created by what each person believes to be true, not by what others believe to be true. Experiences of people and how people react to those experiences form their feelings and their beliefs more than

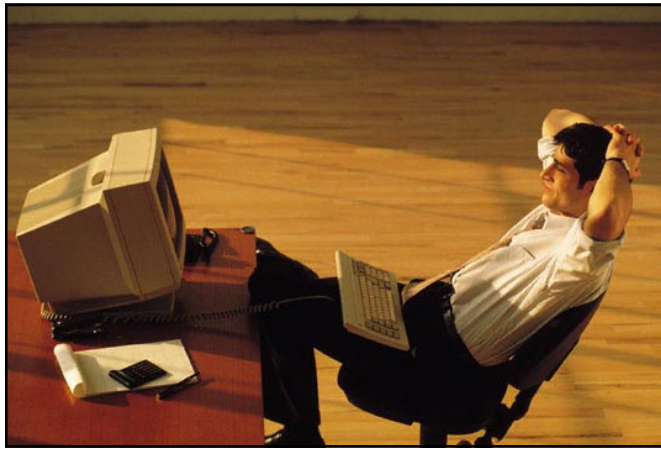
what someone else simply tells them. Even the most stoic, controlled individual is motivated more by feelings than others generally realize.

Take feelings or emotions into consideration when interacting with others. Understanding and using the power of emotion in communication enables you to reach mutual understanding and win/win results more often.

Principle #3. People act for their reasons, not yours. When people think for themselves and solve their own problems, they are much more highly motivated.

People rarely change patterns of behavior without considering the impact of their choice. They usually think about a situation before they take action on it. Admittedly, some people do a great deal more thinking and others do less thinking. But when you are aware that people act for their own reasons, you become increasingly concerned about what motivates them, not just what motivates you. With this awareness, you can guide their thinking toward constructive, self-motivated actions.

To dramatically improve your communication results, keep in mind these principles explaining why people think, feel, and act as they do. Remember that different people take different paths to gain a benefit or to avoid a loss, but there is always a cause or a reason they behave as they do. The patterns of behavior of human beings are infinite, but people are motivated more to action when they are led and encouraged to act in ways that meet their needs.



Training and Developing Employees

The specific method or process for developing or training varies with what is to be taught, the learning abilities of the people involved, and their prior experience. This basic approach can be followed as a general outline for instruction on any type of training or development:

1. Explain what is to be done and why. Tell team members what the task involves and why it is important. Answer any questions in a friendly, positive manner. Point out how the individuals will benefit. If they can expect to receive higher pay, increased job status, or become more valuable to the organization in some other tangible way, tell them so. Describe to them how their efforts help reach the organization's goals. Remind them that by receiving further training and development, they can better meet their personal goals for increased responsibility and greater compensation.

2. Explain the major steps. Break down the task into steps that are easy to understand. Provide a written description and guidelines in addition to your verbal explanations. Providing a written procedure saves you and the team member time later in answering questions. Written procedures also demonstrate your confidence in the abilities of your team members to follow written instructions, to answer their own questions, and to learn independently.

3. Have the trainee explain to you the procedure. Encourage the trainee to "talk through" the procedure. This helps you and the trainee to identify any misunderstanding about the procedure. When all the trouble spots are eliminated and trainees can accurately and confidently describe the procedure, they are ready for the next step.

4. Demonstrate the procedure. Teach one step at a time. Demonstrate what to do by performing the activity, explaining as you work, while they watch and listen. Remember that people learn differently. Nearly all learn best by watching the successful performance of the skills you are teaching and then by actually performing the skills themselves.

5. Help trainees to perform the procedure. When you first allow the trainee to perform the procedure independently, remain available as a resource. Avoid assuming too much responsibility. Remember, you are there to help the trainee succeed.

6. Evaluate progress. Praise satisfactory performance

and point out ways to improve still more. Always emphasize what a person does right. Show what could be done better, and ask questions that lead the trainees to expand their understanding of the process and to develop the knowledge to perform correctly. Give major attention to the aspects of the performance you want to be repeated. Wrong behavior will then be eliminated, and good performance will take its place.

7. Provide a tracking system. Set up a method of tracking performance. Always inspect what you expect. This approach encourages people to become accountable for their own success and adds to the respect they feel toward you as

a good coach and mentor. As soon as possible, put learners on their own to perform with only routine checkpoints. Let them know you have confidence in their ability. The efficiency and effectiveness of nearly every task in any organization can be enhanced by providing a written procedure for it. Written guidelines require careful analysis of a task, a description of the best way to do it, and a tracking system

for determining how well the task is being done. Use a tracking system to enable people to measure their success so they can assume responsibility for their own continuous improvement.

Because you have greater experience and expertise than your trainees and possibly also possess more ability, becoming impatient or even irritable is easy when instructing them because they do not learn as quickly as you expect. Remember that you can never transfer years of knowledge and skill directly to another person. If you assume a condescending, impatient attitude, people quickly detect it and cannot do their best. Use the advantage of your own level of expertise to facilitate the learning experience of the other person.

You are constantly teaching, training, and developing other people. Every time you give someone an assignment, or tell a person what to do, how to do it, and when it must be completed, you use some technique of instruction. By becoming more aware of these everyday opportunities for training and development, you can turn informal instruction into powerful learning experiences for both yourself and your team members. Because pride of achievement is a powerful motivator, take full advantage of it as an effective coach, mentor, and leader.



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