“Commuter – one who spends his life in riding to and from his wife; A man who shaves and takes the train. And then rides back to shave again.” (E.B. White)
The mission of AIS is to improve the health of the community and the world by setting the standard of excellence of stress management in education, research, clinical care and the workplace. Diverse and inclusive, The American Institute of Stress educates medical practitioners, scientists, health care professionals and the public; conducts research; and provides information, training and techniques to prevent human illness related to stress.

AIS provides a diverse and inclusive environment that fosters intellectual discovery, creates and transmits innovative knowledge, improves human health, and provides leadership to the world on stress related topics.
CONTENTMENT

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AIS Daily Life Stress Board

Chaired by Dr. Michel Woodbury-Farina, the role of this board is to develop initiatives and communications to serve the stress management needs of all people.

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WHY STRESS MAKES US STUPID

Michel Woodbury–Farina, MD, FAIS
Chairman of the AIS Daily Life Stress Board

Stress. All of us know what stress is. However did you know that stress might be setting off an autoimmune-like reaction in the brain that results in an attack on our hippocampus? Did you also know that there is a medication being studied that can modulate this reaction; possibly even preventing the damage from occurring? Read on...

What many people do not know about the stress response is that when we feel anxious in a "stressful situation" our unconscious-primitive brain-limbic system thinks that we are in imminent danger of losing our lives. The exact sequence is that when we see a menacing stimulus, this is sent to the visual cortex and then to the thalamus. There thanks to the connections to the cerebellum an assessment is made of how emotionally balanced the input is. If there is any signs of imbalance, messages are then sent to the amygdala. The amygdala then "consults" with the hippocampus in order to decide how menacing the threat is. The hippocampus is like the hard drive of a computer, intelligence of the limbic system. In fact we have the hippocampus in order to help us find our way home. Thus, much information is stored there. If the hippocampus gives the "go-ahead" the amygdala sets off the "alarm response" it is usually mediated by the sympathetic or epi-nephrine-adrenaline/fight-flight reaction. The other system, the parasympathetic or "rest and digest" system is rarely set off, fortunately, as it is seen when someone faints. Note that up to now, nowhere in this sequence is the prefrontal cortex-rational brain involved.

Remember, the fight-flight reaction is in response to the feeling that the person is going to get killed. In this situation the goal of the brain is to make us as stupid as possible so we can impulsively avoid the threat. There are many
efforts to preclude the involvement of the prefrontal cortex, the one part of the brain that would make us think too much. The main one being that the prefrontal cortex gets less oxygenation due to vasoconstriction of the vasculature of the prefrontal cortex. Again, the idea of being stupid is to be as impulsive as possible so as to deal as fast as possible with the option of fighting or fleeing. This most likely explains the rain of bodies that we saw in the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers. Why else would people jump to their deaths and not look for an alternative strategy like going up to the roof and waiting for rescue? Their frontal cortex were effectively bypassed and the flight response was taken literally to our horror.

The idea that is being developed in psychiatry is that in this fight-flight response there is an activation of the inflammatory response. We might be programmed to be depressed thanks to our immune system. When we are ill, our immune system via it's cytokines, especially IL-6, makes us feel very tired and not want to get out of bed so that our energy is conserved for the recovery process. What we have found is that depressed people have an over activated immune system. This activation of the immune system is referred to as an inflammatory reaction and in depression there is a chronic inflammatory reaction. As an aside the inflammatory reaction also results in the production of tumor necrosis factor-alpha which is a reputed step in the development of diabetes. Some see diabetes as the result of chronic inflammation because of this.

How does the inflammatory response contribute to the brain’s fight-flight response? Well it turns out that if a person is in a stressful situation and returns to face "imminent death" the brain figures that the limbic system has not become "stupid" enough. What better way to ensure less "thought" about the dangerousness of the threat than to try to destroy the hard drive, that is, the hippocampus. Thus if the hippocampus is compromised, there will be less of a chance that the hippocampus will see this threat as benign, making it more likely that will set off the amigdala. In fact, we are seeing the hippocampus axonal cells lose. There are arborizations that make hippocampal mineralocorticoid and glucocorticoid receptors work more effectively. Since conventional antidepressants have been shown to reverse this phenomena, many feel this destruction explains the antidepressant’s effects. This is also the basis for treating a depression for a year; six months to stop the damage and six months to rebuild what was damaged.

To delve further into how this occurs, we need to know about the immune system. The brain has its own immune cells called microglia. Apparently in schizophrenia these cells attack various parts of the brain and are felt to contribute to the illness. Now, many of the major psychiatric illnesses such as depression and anxiety are thought to be due to this type of inflammation which implies that the microglia are also the ones involved in attacking the brain and causing these illnesses. Why would this make sense? Well remember that the goal of the brain is to be a stupid and as impulsive as possible? What better way to do that then to attack the hippocampus? As shown before, this is the best way to make sure that we are more likely to do something impulsive to avoid the stressful situation. In this scenario, the depressed person will start to make poorer decisions and, due to the cytokines causing fatigue, finally stay home. Thus, the brain has succeeded in making the person avoid the place where there was perceived danger.

As a final note research is now centering on how to control this microglia attack. One of the most intriguing medications is minocin, an old antibiotic, turns out it is a microglia modulator. It stops the microglia attack without affecting its other properties. Think of the implications as some now think that Alzheimers is most likely a result of microglia attack.
We made it to 2013, and we are way overdue for some straight talk about stress! In our first edition of Contentment, I’m pleased to introduce you to some of our outstanding AIS Fellows, committed to bringing you the most current stress-related issues and hot topics, along with science-based tools that will be easy to implement into even the busiest of schedules. The fact is, stress is not going away, nor do we want it to. Research clearly demonstrates that stress in itself is not a bad thing, but rather a necessary condition for our survival. When a healthy system tackles a moderate amount of stress, it can actually serve as a stimulant for growth. Most of us will admit that the times we experienced the most growth in our life were also those that came with a great deal of stress. However, if we continue to pile on stress at such overwhelming rates our systems absolutely cannot tolerate it, and we enter into a steady state of breakdown; often until the point where the ramifications are too harmful to bounce back from.

In this edition we focus on one aspect of our daily life that often provides a source of significant stress - the workplace. Our 24/7, constantly connected, need-it-yesterday society puts our system into a chronic state of stress, one that we are not prepared to handle without some adequate time and energy dedicated to recovery. While time management appears to be our biggest concern at work, never quite having enough time to get everything done, it’s really the energy we bring to the time that matters most when it comes to optimal performance. In the pages that follow we will provide you with some ways to think about stress differently in order to alter your perception and ultimately your experience. We have also included specific recovery techniques along with audio and video tools designed to help boost brainpower and resilience over time, increasing not just your performance but also your health, happiness, and longevity.
Why not start right now? Before reading any further, spend just 90 seconds shifting your brain and body into a more optimal state for processing the information you are about to read by doing this short 90-second recharge break. Enjoy!
10 COSTLY MYTHS ABOUT STRESS YOU CAN’T AFFORD TO BELIEVE

by Cynthia Ackrill, MD, FAIS

When we operate—think, behave, and make choices—under errant assumptions we may pay dearly and unknowingly in financial, mental, physical, and emotional health.

There is too much written and said about stress today. It is stressful just to tune into it! And, if what we focus on becomes our reality, why would we want to focus on stress? We don’t—we don’t want to keep focused on anything in the obstacle category. But we will benefit from dispelling some of the myths under which we subconsciously and consciously operate, so we can be pro-active in managing both the big and little trials of daily life.

Clearly understanding the challenges and choices of dealing with the stressors in our lives allows us to move from a sort of numb, reactive, or overwhelmed state to a pro-active, empowered state. It can also help us move from good performance to excellence, brilliance, and vitality. Think of a day when you have been really “on.” You felt present, quick, focused, energized, and able to energize and influence others. Stress, whether obvious or lurking below awareness, steals such moments from us, eroding our performance capacity. In 2003 improperly managed stress alone was estimated to have cost US businesses $300 billion dollars/year. Imagine what that number has become in the last few years!

Now at this point, many high-achievers object, “But, I thrive on stress!” or “Stress is something that happens to wimps who miss opportunities!” It is very true that we do not all have the same reactions, resilience, or even perception of stress. And therein lies part of the fodder for myths and the reason stress can be a ruthless profit thief and silent killer. But before addressing this further, it is crucial to make sure we are talking about the same beast. From a performance (and health) perspective—what is stress?
Myth # 1 Stress is something that happens to us.  
Truth: Stress is our reaction to what we perceive is happening to us. This is key! One man’s garbage is another man’s treasure. Why? Because of perception, the meaning we assign to what we sense is happening. One person may experience complete exhilaration and liberation walking across fiery coals in a fire-walking ceremony, and another may experience intense pain barely touching a hot pot during an argument with a spouse. In both cases the stimulus to the body, the stressor, is heat, but differing perceptions of that heat assign different meanings to the stimulus.

Expectation plays a critical role here. Whenever our perception does not meet our expectations we feel threatened, out of balance, stressed. When a car cuts us off, a supposed colleague disrespects us in front of peers, or when our most loyal client suddenly moves to the competitor, we feel stressed by our perception that what we expected to happen did not. Expectations color perception, and set the context for the stories into which we fit how we experience our world. Expectations also offer an important opening for stress management.

Myth # 2 It’s the big stuff that brings us down. 
Truth: Major life changes are significantly stressful, but it’s the constant barrage of little stressors that wears down our resilience, our performance, and our health.

Most stress assessments ask you about major life events—job loss, death, marital status change, etc. But they miss the profoundly additive effects of the day in, day out tiny challenges to our systems: the irritable boss/spouse/child, an
unexpected bill, the broken garage door, or the meeting running late. Ever heard of death by a thousand paper cuts? The “little” stress reactions tax every system in our bodies and rapidly drain our energy and brainpower.

**Myth # 3  Stress is bad for us.**

**Truth:** We need stress to survive! We cannot perform at all without some level of arousal from perceived challenge. But when our perceived capability to meet that challenge is exceeded, we feel stress. Maintaining just the right amount of challenge for peak performance is truly hard to do without proactive stress management.

**Myth # 4  We can accurately tell when we are stressed.**

**Truth:** Ha—just ask a friend, coworker or spouse! When we are in the thick of it, we cannot accurately assess how off balance we are. The stress reaction evolved to protect us from danger and is triggered by any perceived threat—hissing snake or IRS envelope. It is an amazing system involving 1400 chemical reactions that evolved to keep us safe. It automatically redirects blood away from the higher functioning, thinking, self-awareness part of our brains to our large leg muscles, so we can escape. After all, it’s not time to analyze what type of snake that is in front of you; it’s time to run! So the person in dis-stress is much like the person at the office party who has had one too many drinks—not really aware of their impairment.

Think again of a day when you were really “on,” had great energy, felt optimistic and creative. That is very different, not only from those days of acute crisis, but also from those days where you are just plodding on, slightly distracted by simmering worries, hoping to make it through with some things crossed off your to-do list. This awareness can help you discover more “on” days.

**Myth # 5  One day we will be stress-free.**

**Truth:** Chronic stressors ebb and flow, but are here to stay. Our job is to learn ways to proactively manage the challenges of life in ways that preserve our health, energy, brain-power, and productivity. Chronically operating as if today’s challenges are unusual is an aspect of denial subconsciously used by many to cope—a delusion that creates unrealistic expectations and unhappiness. This denial also keeps us in an unempowered, reactive state, and allows the deleterious chronic effects to wear us down. This does not mean that some times in our lives are not worse than others, but stress is part of life. We should give

“*It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.*”  -Mark Twain
up hope for or stop working to create better situations, but we do need to be realistic about building up resilience for what life doles out.

**Myth # 6  We can ignore stress.**

Truth: NO! Unmanaged stress is a silent killer—draining our finances, productivity, brilliance, creativity, focus, energy, health, and happiness. On the financial front stress drains profits through costly absenteeism, direct and indirect healthcare costs, accidents, and presenteeism—that feeling of being at work without our full energy, focus power, or access to brilliance.

Research provides a very lengthy list of the destruction caused by chronically sounding the stress alarm. Prolonged or frequent production of cortisol, the key hormone of the stress system, impairs memory, zaps creative power, ages cells, causes fat retention, leads to depression, and triggers or advances most disease states contributing to 80% of medical visits. The good news: proper stress management can reverse these statistics!

**Myth # 7  We have no choice, no power in the face of stressors.**

Truth: We can make a huge difference by proactively reducing our exposure, re-aligning our perspectives, and raising our resilience. By learning how to make clear choices, assess and address challenges, and incorporate techniques and practices to fortify resilience, we can negotiate stressors with far less toll on our productivity, health, and happiness.

**Myth # 8  Stress management is mostly about time management.**

Truth: Stress management is about energy management, perception control, and balance. Yes, good time management definitely helps you avoid creating more stress. But managing the energy of the human system is the real key. Stressors challenge our systems and use energy. So to function well with resilience, that energy must be continually renewed. Effective stress management addresses both ways to reduce the energy drain of stress exposure, as well as ongoing ways to renew energy and build resilience. Think of creating a “hybrid model” of performing with built in habits and rituals to refresh the energy supply.

**Myth # 9  My thoughts are “real!” (My perspective is right!).**

Truth: Moment to moment, our brains create our thoughts, feelings, memories, and even what we think we see, in the context of our
perception. And perception is completely individual and malleable—the product of our history, beliefs, emotional and physical states, the environment, circumstances, and the influence of others. To say, “Our minds play tricks on us,” can be an understatement. Think of optical illusions. In experiments, food appears bigger if we are hungry. Research shows that if we even think about a situation where we felt out of control before performing a task, we are more likely to make mistakes or experience inappropriate suspicion. And as independent thinking as we would like to assume we are, peer pressure is actually hardwired into our brains.

Imagine you are on your way home and a car cuts you off. You’ve had a long day, started by yet another spat with your teenager. You missed lunch and 2 important new client calls stuck in an exasperating meeting about the red tape stalling your project. As that car zips into your lane your thoughts are probably very different than if you had just had a stellar day complete with a surprise hug from your daughter and landing a great new client, and now you are on your way to a fun-filled weekend with old friends. In both cases, your brain should react with an appropriate quick stress reaction to keep you safe—applying the brakes before you even realize what is happening. But how much that event harmfully raises your stress hormone levels depends on the thoughts you have in response to the situation. Attitudes, perceptions, emotions, etc. profoundly influence those thoughts.

Perception context explains why two people can have very different reactions to the exact same experience. We have a natural bias to believe our thoughts, our story. That is usually a good thing. But when our perception colors thoughts and feelings as threats, it raises our stress levels. Part of effective stress management is perception management—checking and actively managing our perceptions. The good news: repeated attention to values, purpose, and gratitude gives us “perception resilience.”

**Myth # 10 I can take care of myself later after....”**

Truth: Stressors are always present and the negative effects of poorly managed stress are silent and cumulative. Poorly managed stress hijacks our brainpower. Much like heart disease the symptoms are not apparent until most of the damage is done. You need to plan and act now to protect against the damage of dis-stress.

The good news is there are multiple ways to reverse the trends and find more energy, focus, hap-
piness, and health. And small changes have disproportionate results! The ROI for self-care is huge—improved health, access to brilliance and life satisfaction. This is true individually and collectively. Feeling energized, engaged, and effective is a far better feeling.

**Bonus Myth # 11 I can’t make much of a difference in this crazy workplace or world.**

"Be the change you want to see in the world.” – Gandhi

There is a lot of controversy over the exact origin of this quote, but in our hearts and in our experience we know its truth—that how we handle the world affects those around us. Mirror neurons explain how our brains reflect the behaviors of others. Parenting certainly provides many examples of how our ability to manage our own stress level impacts the stress levels of those around us. And stress is definitely contagious at work, but so is positivity and calm, and they create a more productive environment.

Experiment at your next meeting. Take several long slow deep breaths before you start talking and observe the difference in your communication and how others listen. Watch as they mirror your deliberate slow down of the “busyness.” Go bold...rephrase something to explore the positive/possibility side. Surprise a group with a stretch break to refresh their brain. Let others mirror the vitality, alertness, and engagement you begin to feel from proactively taking care of your stress.

Understanding the definition and mechanisms of stress is the beginning of the awareness necessary to make change. But unfortunately, knowledge alone does not equal motivation. (There would be no fat doctors if this were the case!) Our brains love novelty, but by nature resist changing habits, because habits conserve energy. Change is inherently hard—only 1 in 9 patients faced with the near death experience of cardiac surgery are able to sustain lifestyle changes!

But there is lots of good news. Brain and behavioral sciences offer new understandings and tools to support our learning to make choices and develop habits that will reverse the energy drain of stress. Habit creation is the secret to lasting change. And small changes have huge effect. **We really can create brilliant, effective, and healthy lives by proactively managing our stress and energy.** What small shift are you willing to make for your future performance and happiness?
Nearly every organization will experience transitions at times. Transitions could be mergers, acquisitions, force reductions, restructurings or a number of other events. These events can understandably be stressful on the employees of the organization, as well as executives and managers.

As a human resources manager, you are a vital part of the transitions process. You are expected to be there for the employees who are nervous about the changes. You are also expected to ease the transition for management and executives. You have a big job ahead of you!

At one point in the business world, the role of human resources in a transition was to clean up after the transition was over. Human resources managers had to find positions for employees in a merger, let employees go in a force reduction and change roles in a restructuring.

Fortunately, today most organizations realize that human resources should be consulted and utilized from the very beginning of a transition. The expertise of a human resources manager can be invaluable in preparing an organization for a period of change.

Beginning when the news of a transition reaches the organization, human resources should step in to make the transition less stressful for all parties involved. The actions needed by human resources during a transition may not be the same functions that you are used to serving at all other times.

Stress management is often needed for employees who are nervous about the transition. If jobs will be elimi-
nated or changed, it's safe to assume that employees will need some help dealing with the changes. Keeping them informed of any new information helps to reduce the stress of not knowing what is going to happen next.

Career counseling may also be required in some situations. When it is obvious that many jobs will be eliminated, helping future displaced employees discover their talents is an essential human resources function. Even if jobs will not be eliminated, it may become necessary for some employees to change positions after the transition. Career counseling can help them understand where they may be happiest within your organization or another. Morale is often a problem during transitions, especially mergers and acquisitions. Employees may be convinced that they will soon be replaced or that their positions will be eliminated. They may be suspicious of management and of the new team being brought aboard. In this situation, team-building exercises are invaluable. They can encourage employees to air their grievances or worries while affirming the team bonds.

Whenever an organization goes through a transition, it's normal for the employees to feel unsettled and nervous about the future. You, as a human resources manager, can help them understand the process and try to calm their fears.

Keeping the lines of communication open will do wonders for keeping employees calm. Even if the news is not what they wanted to hear, most employees will be grateful for your honesty. It's important to maintain that level of trust when going through a transition. Communicating openly and keeping employees up-to-date is essential for maintaining trust. Your actions during a transition can help shape the future of your organization. Do your best to keep employees happy and informed and you will find that the transition goes smoothly.
In order to keep our brains and our bodies operating optimally, it's critical to build in periods of strategic disengagement to allow our systems to recharge. It’s clear that non-stop strenuous physical exercise is not the best approach to being strong, coordinated, and healthy. We all need regular periods of rest and recovery at all levels of biological dynamics in order for our muscles to develop and function optimally. And this regular oscillation between exercise and rest is especially important when it comes to your mental energy. Some people might initially react negatively to the idea of having to set aside regular downtime for their brain to recover. Chances are you’re already feeling pressured by deadlines, and taking time off seems to be the last way to help you get things done. But just the opposite will prove to be the case. Consider the concept of muscle fatigue; without short breaks from physical stress, your muscles at some point will begin to spasm and malfunction. Periodic rest is required for the system to repair and become stronger.

Medical studies show us there’s no way of getting around the blunt fact that work usually generates mental stress, and a stressed-out brain performs at progressively lower levels. Too much stress is without question the number-one killer of both efficiency and creativity. This is why it’s vital to learn specific ways to regularly shift your focus of attention out of stress mode and into rest mode at work, thereby giving your chronically deep-fried synapses at least a few ‘time-out’ moments during the day to regroup, recover, and recharge.
that the same basic thing happens in your brain. You begin to lose the mental power necessary to hold your focus on your work, which causes more errors and diminishes creative vitality. Focus is what work is all about. Your attention, like your energy, is one of the most valuable resources you possess. Therefore, making sure that you take time to keep your brain sharp is one of the primary responsibilities you have each day. You also want to preserve it, so you have energy left at the end of the day to spend with the people and things that matter most to you. This enables you to be at your best in the present moment and builds your brain health and cognitive reserve in order to support a better brain as you age.

The key to a successful recharge process is learning what works for you and creating a consistent practice that you can sustain over time. Remember that although it seems a bit contradictory, relaxing can be hard work. However, once you push through the initial discomfort of quieting your mind, your mental muscle will become stronger and more flexible, and you’ll be able to tap into relaxation more quickly and effectively. It doesn’t take long, and doing it regularly (at least three times a day) brings remarkable uplifts of vitality, clarity, empathy, and creativity – four of the boosts we need most in order to be successful and to enjoy life at work and at home. When we utilize relaxation strategies we are able to meet three key goals of balancing brain chemistry: recover, rebalance, and recharge.

1. Recover. In general, most of us do not need to do more; we need to do less. We’re over-stressed, not under-stressed. Therefore, a crucial item on our daily to-do list is to periodically and intentionally not do anything at all. To optimize our operating systems, we need to create a stimulus that prompts us to adapt. However, most people overtrain their brains – something that leads to over-usage injuries that not only slow us down, but also literally erode the brain’s structure. When we are able to recover mentally on a regular basis, we reduce the symptoms of overuse, and keep our operating system strong. This provides us with the first aspect of cognitive fitness: brain strength.

2. Rebalance. Taking time to pause and get back in tune with our natural breathing process, thereby stimulating the body and brain’s relaxation response, allows our systems to regain its natural state of internal balance, or homeostasis. Studies consistently show that we experience chronic stress, worry, confusion, and fatigue when we are out of balance because our brain cannot operate efficiently.

If we choose to regularly regain balance by shifting our attention away from mental and emotional stressors and toward positive, present-moment physical experience, we enable our mind to return to a more harmonious state. Spending a few minutes thinking about things we are grateful for has been shown to improve the functioning of our systems, both physically and mentally. This allows us to be more collaborative, creative, and hopeful. In this positive, balanced state, our brain can help us perform at our best and keep our operating system flexible. This is our second aspect of cognitive fitness: brain flexibility.
3. Recharge. Mental energy is not a limitless resource. In order to keep our systems functioning at their best over time, we must strategically invest energy back into them. We do this by removing our attention (just temporarily) from all of the energy-draining, problem solving thinking and toward the primary charging mechanism of our body - our breathing. With practice you will see that every time you tune into your breath experience, you show yourself love and support. As soon as you focus on your breathing, your mind temporarily lets go of the habitual fixations that drain you. Adding a specific focus phrase or positive mantra will also help to remind your brain that you are taking care of your energy needs so that you can continue to thrive, not slip into stress-induced survival mode. My favorite personal focus phrase is "I have enough" on the in-breath and "I am enough" on the out-breath, encouraging a sense of safety and security.

By scheduling specific recovery time throughout the day, you will increase your energy holistically – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually – so that you’re running on a full tank and able to be your best self. A brain that is full of energy will support your health, happiness, and performance, and keep your operating system functioning optimally over time. This is the third aspect of cognitive fitness: brain endurance.

I recommend building a routine of a 3x3 recharge practice – starting with just 3 minutes, 3 times a day in mental recovery. I realize that spending 9 minutes a day focusing on something other than work is a lot to ask. However, you are your most valuable resource. If you don’t take care of yourself, you can’t possibly take care of anyone or anything else! Be wise - energize.

The coin op Laundromat was the greatest sinkhole of wasted time in my week. As a busy graduate student, dedicated martial artist and burgeoning practitioner of acupuncture in an apprenticeship in Boston’s Chinatown, I viewed the many distractions around me as enemies instead of opportunities.

The turning point for me came during a meditation session with Kwan Saihung, one of my martial arts and Taoist teachers. I was supposed to be focusing on my breath, body and intension of mind, yet all I could manage was to ruminate on a long list of to do’s, including the upcoming torment I would experience at the Laundromat! Master Kwan, sensing my disconnected and unfocused spirit, commented that the only difference between our minds was that I gave energy and power to my distractions, instead of acknowledging them as he did, while using my training to temporarily dismiss them, so that I may focus on the tasks in the moment. This wisdom would help me change my attitude about my surroundings, assist me in helping thousands of patients and corporate clients dial down stress, so they can calmly achieve peak performance.

“"If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude.””

Maya Angelou

I felt the clank of every coin drop sheer the sides of my head and the churning of the great metal cylinders of the dryers filled to capacity rumble in my stomach as I sat frustrated waiting for my weekly sentence to be served, until I finally learned the simple lessons that would set me free.
You Don’t Have to Be The Karate Kid to Kick Out Stress

My genius friend Bill, who was chief scientist to many successful Boston based companies, told me once, “the best time to learn something new, is when you need it the most.” I can’t recall a time in my life when I believe we need to learn to deal more effectively with stress. Now is the time to learn these easy exercises that when applied daily, can create profound improvement in your life, business and relationships. I teach body, breath and mind focusing techniques to a wide range of audiences including business leaders, employees in wellness programs and stay at home moms. None of them had a martial arts background, yet all had a desire to realize their potential.

3 Stepping Stones on Your Path to Peace

“Have confidence that the stone you need for the next step of your journey will appear beneath your feet.” I share with you words that have given me courage to take a step into the unknown during many times in my life. My friend and meditation buddy is a Tibetan Buddhist who is remembered by me for his laughter and joyous spirit. Learn to regulate these 3 areas for staying in the moment at home or work.

Body: The movement of the spine and joints help you with increased flexibility, while keeping the conscious part of your mind occupied. Feet are shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent, hips tucked, shoulders relaxed, chin dropped to level and aligned with neck. This posture will soon feel centered and relaxed. Eyes may be open, slightly closed or “soft gaze” or closed when you become more comfortable with each movement.

Breathe: Gently breathe in through the nose and exhale through your mouth. Allow your lower abdomen to relax and expand as you breathe in and contract as you exhale. There are many breathe techniques to achieve specific outcomes. This is a good place to start.

Mind: Allow yourself to use the imagery described in the videos to transport your intension, focus your mind and let go of stress.

Formula For Success

This simple formula has helped me map out the process for creating your own unique turning point, while enjoying reduced stress with increased productivity.

Awareness: The initial Ah Ha moment or the final tipping point of inspiration.

Skills: You learn how to make changes in your life. The videos that follow are the start of skill building. They are meant to be easily understood, so that you can apply them quickly and effortlessly in your life.

Habits: Practice leads to enjoyment, which becomes anchored in a new lifestyle. It’s how you handle the day, not the events of the day that determine its outcome.

Outcomes: You now relish in the achievements you have earned. Your approach to daily life and its many challenges are less overwhelming and become surprisingly manageable. Clarity leads to focused priorities, which develops increased performance. Congratulations! You are new and improved. Now repeat. The best is yet to come.
"The door hinge will rust if it is not used."
Hua Tuo, Renowned second century A.D. Chinese physician.

Less Stress and More Focus with Tai Qi Ball
The slow moving meditative motions of Tai Qi Chuan are familiar sites in the early morning hours in many open parks. Recent studies are suggesting a variety of health benefits including joint flexibility, increased balance and a lowering of geriatric depression. Tai Qi Chuan is a system of movements and breathing exercises that encompass self-defense and general exercise benefits, while incorporating a variety of methods including two person matching sets, Tai Qi long sword, ruler and ball. I was fortunate that my principle teacher Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming had mastered all of these techniques and could generously share them with his students. He has my eternal gratitude. This video demonstrates Tai Qi ball exercises that can help you drop stress and focus your mind at home as well as the workplace. Enjoy!

Break Free of Stress with a Healing Breath
Qi Gong or Chi Kung may be defined as "the way of working with life energy." It is a major branch of Chinese medicine that denotes methods used to cultivate, regulate, and harness Qi (vital energy, or life force) for general self-preservation, health, healing, self-defense and longevity.
Recent studies suggests these easy to learn breathing exercises boost immu-
nity, promote emotional health and affect various other components of human physiology. I know that I it’s a fast way to minimize stress and it feels great! Now it’s your turn. Watch this video and begin to put stress in its place.
Make Friends with the Fire
The Coin Op Laundromat eventually became one of my most productive stops during my week. I was able to focus and get tremendous amounts of work done. My demeanor must have shifted as well since regulars began to smile and greet me during our weekly rituals. Where do you need to make friends with a fire of distraction or disruption? I hope you will develop practices from the exercises you experienced in this article and find peace with productivity among the washing machines in your world.

Bibliography:


Recommended Reading
The Root of Chinese Qi Gong: Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming
The Eight Pieces of Brocade: Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming
The Way of Qi Gong: Kenneth S. Cohen

Recommended Website
www.naturalstandard.com: Natural Standard was founded by healthcare providers and researchers to provide high-quality, evidence-based information about complementary and alternative medicine including dietary supplements and integrative therapies.

Special thanks to J. Brown video editing

About the Author
David Sollars is a licensed acupuncturist, author, speaker and trainer of human potential. Whether in the clinic or the boardroom, he specializes in assisting others with personal and organizational effectiveness. To discover more, please explore www.davidsollars.com.
At AIS we know that many of the issues you face in your daily life have two sides. Here we explore both sides of an issue that impacts your Work/Life balance—Flex time.

**Is flex-time more of a stress reliever or stress-creator for businesses and employees?**

Now that an increasing number of companies recognize the fact that a less stressed workforce is usually a healthier and more productive workforce, the possibility of “flex time” is growing in popularity. With the steady increase of dual-earner families, more and more of the workforce taking care of both their children and their aging parents, and with a growing number of families working longer hours to make ends meet, flexibility in scheduling is becoming more of a necessity. The fact that this topic was discussed in the third presidential debate is an obvious sign that flex-time has “arrived” as an attractive and viable option for many. But is the option of flex-time beneficial enough for both companies and employees to become a widely-used option?

There are some obvious complications that come with flex-time. For companies, it may be difficult to find times for meetings and other forms of collaboration if there are few times when all of the key players are present. It may be burdensome for some companies to have enough staff present at important times if much of the workforce would like to be gone at that time. It may even be more challenging to be sure that all employees are present when they need to be. This may make flex-time a stressful option to manage for many companies. For employees, if the company culture does not fully support flex-time, workers may not feel comfortable exercising their right to it, for fear of appearing less committed, or even lazy. They may be concerned that this could lead to being passed over for promotions and important responsibilities. If there is a lack of clear communication between workers and employers, flex-time can create quite a bit of stress.

There are many reasons why flex-time is enviable for employees, however. Being able to adjust work hours around kids’ schedules, as well as doctors’ appointments and other lifestyle factors can relieve quite a bit of stress for busy workers, particularly parents. Even simply having the feeling of maintaining more control in one’s schedule can create a greater feeling of work-life balance, and this can relieve stress.

Companies may benefit from offering flex-time as well. Workers who are less stressed and more content may be more loyal to the company for which they work. Workers who are not operating un-
der chronic stress (which can result from a lack of work-life balance) tend to be more productive and creative, and take fewer sick days. Businesses who offer their employees the option of flex-time may retain a greater percentage of their workforce, decreasing employee turnover, and may even find themselves able to attract a higher caliber of employee when they do need to hire.

Many have found that the structure of flex-time can be challenging at first, but when done right, flex-time can offer clear benefits to companies and workers alike, and is well worth the effort. What do you think about the effectiveness of flex-time for relieving stress in workers and increasing efficiency for businesses? When asked, here are some responses people have shared with us:

"I wish I had it! I'd be a much better mom, worker, wife, daughter, and friend."

"I have kids who depend on me and a husband whose job is not flexible, so I would definitely take a job that offers flex-time over a job that didn't, even if the pay were less. In choosing the job I have now, schedule flexibility was a huge factor."

"For me it was always a pro for the flexibility of it, but sometimes the calculating of it on our work-brain system could be a pain."

"I find it difficult to switch gears, which I think differs from person to person. So I find I need a big chunk of time to get into a task to make it worth the effort. Flex time, for me, in an awful exercise in self-torture."

We asked this question via Facebook and Twitter, and would love to hear from you!

Find us at:

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and

https://twitter.com/AIS_StressNews

Be sure to “follow” and “like” us so you can participate in future discussions!
GET INSIDE OUR HEAD

It’s Not Our Credentials That Make AIS So Impressive, It’s the Fellows That Go with Them.

The American Institute of Stress is a non-profit organization established in 1978 at the request of Dr. Hans Selye (the Founder of the Stress Concept) to serve as a clearinghouse for information on all stress related subjects. AIS Founding Fellows include:

Paul Rosch  
Linus Pauling  
Alvin Toffler  
Bob Hope  
Michael DeBakey  
Herbert Benson  
Charles Spielberger

Join our prominent psychologists, physicians, other health care practitioners and health conscious individuals who are interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life.

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