Successfully Knockout Workplace Stress
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

We value opinions of our readers.
Please feel free to contact us with any comments, suggestions or inquiries.
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Contentment is a quarterly newsletter published in March, June, September and December with news and advertising designed with the general public in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between stress and health because technical jargon is avoided and it is easy to understand. Contentment is archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

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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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Mobile device addiction linked to depression, anxiety.


Cell phone addiction

84% worldwide say they couldn’t go a single day without their mobile device in their hand

How did you feel when you misplaced your phone?

- 73% Panicked
- 14% Desperate
- 7% Sick
- 6% Relieved

The Latest Headlines...

**Early life stress and adolescent depression linked to impaired development of reward circuits**

Jamie L. Hanson, Ahmad R. Hariri, Douglas E. Williamson. *Blunted Ventral Striatum Development in Adolescence Reflects Emotional Neglect and Predicts Depressive Symptoms. Biological Psychiatry, 2015; 78 (9): 598 DOI: [10.1016/j.biopsych.2015.05.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2015.05.010)

**Adolescents stress more with poor sleep**

There are several effective ways to approach stress management. You can have a mix of short-term stress relievers that work for you in a pinch; these can calm you and reverse your body’s stress response when you’re feeling stressed. You can also maintain regular habits that build resilience toward stress; you don’t wait until you’re in a crisis to practice them, and they help you to feel less reactive to whatever stress comes your way. Ideally, if you can maintain a habit that promotes resilience toward stress, but also practice it at a time when you may have a moderate amount of stress to manage, you’ll experience some of both benefits. This is why it’s a great idea to maintain a lunchtime stress relief habit. As most therapists and coaches will tell you, one of the most effective ways to maintain a healthy habit is to build it into your schedule by attaching it to something you’re already doing. Because we all eat lunch, attaching a habit to your lunch break is convenient and it works. It’s also a great time for stress management: you may have accumulated some stress from your day already, and relieving stress during lunch provides you with a chance to start fresh from a better place for the second half of the workday, and likely arrive home less stressed than you would have been at the end of the day.
There are many ways to fit some stress relief into your lunchtime window. The following are some of the most effective stress relievers you can practice—habits that really build resilience if practiced regularly—but this list is to get you started. If, after trying some of these, you begin coming up with your own routines, that’s great, too! Just as long as you’re doing something you can stick with and that works for you, you’re on the right track.

**Take A Brisk Walk**

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to manage stress. It provides an outlet for frustration, it releases endorphins to lift your mood, it brings long-term resilience if practiced regularly and, in cases like walking, it can literally take you to a better place. If you work in an office, you may want to grab your shoes instead of your car when you go to lunch—find a place you can walk to, and let that be your stress relief. If you work from home, you can do the same thing, or you can take a walk around your neighborhood before or after you eat, as part of your lunch break. A bike ride works great, too!

**Find A Quiet Place**

Just finding a place to have some quiet time can be great for stress relief. If you’re able to find a bench in a beautiful park close to where you work or a seat by a fountain, the sights, sounds, and feel of nature can help you to feel more grounded and less entrenched in stress. Add a quiet meditation to the routine and you’ll be building resilience toward stress, and building a habit that can bring many other health benefits as well.

**Practice Office Yoga**

This one is definitely easier to do if you work from home, but there are some simple moves you can practice in an office, or even at your desk. If you have any privacy (or are comfortable enough with your co-workers), you can fit in some quick stretches. (Google “office yoga” to get a visual of what I mean.) This can relieve tension in your body and mind, especially if you are able to have a more robust yoga practice after work.

**Enjoy Music**

You can energize or relax your body with the right music. You may have heard that classical music brings many benefits, but research actually shows that any type of music that you enjoy can bring a benefit. Music with a fast tempo really can energize your physiology, and music with a calm tempo can relax your body and mind. Find lyrics that speak to you and the mood you’re currently in (or would like to be in), and you have a great low-effort way to relieve stress while you eat—or while you walk or drive to lunch. (If you’re self-conscious about sharing your tunes, earbuds are always nice to have.)

**Gratitude Journaling**

Changing your focus from what’s stressing you to what’s blessing you can have a real impact on your mood and your overall sense of wellbeing. If you keep a daily list of three things you’re grateful for, you can lift your spirits, which has been linked by plenty of research with greater resilience and increased resources—when you’re in a better mood, you are more likely to see opportunities and take advantage of them. What a great state of mind to get into at work!
Office Stress: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

WORKPLACE WELLNESS Like beauty, stress is in the eyes of the beholder. At its core, stress is neither good nor bad, but simply a stimulus for change.

Heidi Hanna
Fellow, The American Institute of Stress; Author, “Stressaholic: 5 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Stress”

The impact of stress is determined by one’s perception of the experience and the amount of resources that are available to adapt or cope. Contrary to what many believe, it turns out that trauma can make us stronger, and living a life free of stress can wear us down.

So how do you optimize your stress-related growth?

The good

Because it represents a potential threat, any change is perceived by the brain as stress. The brain’s primary function is to keep the system safe, and an energy demand when resources are low could lead to a deficit that cuts into what’s necessary to survive. When we are running on empty even molehills can feel like mountains.

Add energy through strategies such as social support, an optimistic perspective or gratitude, and suddenly challenge can be seen as an opportunity for growth. Exercise, a flu shot, standing in a long line—these are all stimulation for change that is positive when we are able to adapt to be stronger. It is our perception that determines our experience and ultimately our outcome. Change your mind, and you change your life.

The bad

When we don’t get enough sleep, lack proper nutrition or sit for long periods of time the brain begins to shift the body into conservation mode as a means of protecting itself. Suddenly, that simple task at work, the nagging colleague or family demands we usually breeze
through on a good day turns us into a jerk.

If you were stranded on a deserted island with no food, being patient, loving and kind would be of no help. Killing something and eating it would. What’s worse, this type of everyday "I’m-stressed-and-tired" vibe is highly contagious, and can shift those around us into a similar state.

The ugly

Perhaps the worst stress of all is the kind we don’t even see or feel. We convince ourselves that we thrive on stress or it simply becomes our new norm. Besides, everyone is stressed so who are we to think we have it worse than anyone else?

Slowly but surely, the brain and body break down thanks to stress hormones, which, while helpful in the short-term, lead to the worst kind of internal wear and tear. The American Institute of Stress estimates that 75 to 90 percent of medical visits are stress-related. Although stress will not cause illness or disease, you can assume that it will speed up the development of anything negative that exists in your system.

Add to that the non-stop negative news cycle that convinces the brain it’s dangerous just to get out of bed in the morning, and your brain becomes hijacked by the emotional protection system that diminishes performance and destroys health over time. Unfortunately, talking about the harmful effects of stress typically just stresses us out even more. The good news is, with an adequate recharge routine in place to keep our energy up and our perspective positive, we can use stress to our benefit.

Stress Less: 10 Quick Tips

1. Write down three things you feel grateful for each morning.

2. Practice deep breathing 3-5 minutes each hour.

3. Listen to relaxing or inspiring music before every meeting.

4. Eat something balanced every 3-4 hours to keep blood sugar steady.

5. Move for a few minutes every hour.

6. Send a positive email to someone you appreciate before checking your inbox.

7. Be aware of the messages you’re receiving through TV, web surfing, social media and news.

8. Build strong social connections.

9. Prioritize sleep: at least 7 hours.

10. Disconnect from technology and spend time in nature frequently.
The participants’ bottoms had barely settled into their seats when the cordial atmosphere, typical of an annual gathering of global leaders, was shattered by an accusation shouted across the table, “You are so disrespectful, put away that laptop and listen. I can’t believe you!”

The anticipatory anxiety hijacked the team’s momentum as the group of globally diverse peers struggled separately with the intense emotions of the unexpected accusation, which where only inflamed by what happened next.

“I was only looking up your company to better understand your story and the dilemma you were describing. I’ve done nothing wrong. I refuse to apologize.”

The next moment would define the outcome for the entire team meeting.

“The only way to be our best is to include our best. That means we need to include the whole world, not just pieces of it. That all starts with diversity and inclusiveness. It’s the smart thing. It’s the right thing. And it’s the only way to succeed in today’s global economy.” Mark A. Weinberger, Global Chairman and CEO, Ernst & Young

The Competitive Advantages of D&I are Increasingly Clear

Increasingly our intuitive sense suggests the best ideas of a global organization spring from leadership teams that represent the broad cultural clusters of the marketplace.

Research underscores this as a strategic priority for organizations that want to achieve positive commercial outcomes, while attracting and retaining global talent.
McKinsey and Company’s 2015 research report, *Diversity Matters*, examined proprietary data sets from 366 public companies across a range of industries in Canada, Latin America, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Highlights include:

- Companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians.
- Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians.
- Companies in the bottom quartile both for gender and for ethnicity and race are statistically less likely to achieve above-average financial returns than the average companies in the data set (that is, bottom-quartile companies are lagging rather than merely not leading).
- While certain industries perform better on gender diversity and other industries on ethnic and racial diversity, no industry or company is in the top quartile on both dimensions.
- The unequal performance of companies in the same industry and the same country implies that diversity is a competitive differentiator shifting market share toward more diverse companies.
- The strategic importance of building D&I teams seems clear.

Leading your D&I team through the initial chaos of conflict is key to leveraging their culturally diverse insights and shaping them into deep practical guidance.

**Curiosity Replaces Crisis**

The highly-offended American entrepreneur had been updating the team on the emotional journey of having to sell one-third of the business he founded to fund his strategic global expansion. He contin-
ued his tirade by leaning forward in his chair, looking directly into the eyes of the German software engineer and curtly saying, “You disrespect us all by staring at your laptop when we are speaking to each other about important things.”

Like a high-stakes poker duel, the tension escalated, all eyes shifted in anticipation of the response.

“I say again that I’ve done nothing wrong here, can’t you see I was looking at your company’s website,” he said revealing the screen to everyone. “I will not apologize for that and once more, I don’t care how you feel about it!”

There was a moment of stillness, broken quickly by one of the leaders going to check something in his room and another going to get a cup of tea. The air was polluted with unresolved conflict that stifled the entrepreneurial spirit of solution thinking, which had previously energized the team.

**Create Understanding in the Moment**

The differences of a D&I team can certainly lend themselves to create opportunities for miscommunications and misunderstandings as well as creative innovations. Leadership in the moment is critical to the successful transformation.


Facilitation kept the conversation relevant with each member of the team contributing to the dynamic discussion. This process keeps the participants open for greater discovery instead of shutting them down with judgment or criticism.

**Unlock Conflict’s Creative Potential**

High-performance teams resist old habits of labeling a person and running away from anything that resembles conflict to instead achieve greater potential through new skills of inquiry and understanding.

This requires a commitment to sustained development, yet as the previously mentioned report by McKinsey and Company states in *Diversity Matters*, “Given the higher returns that diversity is expected to bring, we believe it is better to invest now, since winners will pull further ahead and laggards will fall further behind.”

High-performance teams use healthy conflict to build trust, create commitment to shared standards and embed behaviors that reinforce accountability within shared goals.

Learn to transform D&I conflict into its creative potential for your leaders, teams and organizations.
**Conversation highlights for the team include**

- The What Just Happened Conversation? What was your intention?
- What was the impact on others? Untangle your intention from the impact. Describe what happened as if you were a neutral third party.
- Understanding vs. Right & Wrong: Focus on listening to others’ answers to understand them instead of gathering data for defending your own position.
- Stay curious instead of judgmental. “Why did you ever think that would work?” is replaced by “Help me understand why you thought that was the right move?”
- Discover the passion behind their priority by making inquiries such as “Can you tell me why this is so important to you?”

**Leadership reflections included**

- Navigate a conversation with purpose, Intent and understanding.
- Each member of the team is responsible for observing and navigating the discussion.
- Using inquiry transforms overly polite relationships that harbor silent dysfunction into passionate authentic viewpoints that lead to creative innovation.
- Understanding does not mean agreement. Build foundations of trust and high performance by acknowledging your challenges with differing cultural and gender perspectives, while moving to consensus on strategic actions.
- The team viewed conflict as a creative process to surface new ideas and find more collaborative solutions.

**The Identity Conversation**

- We often ignore data that does not support our self image, “I am a good person and could never hurt anyone.”
- Distortion gap between how you see yourself and how others see you, especially in conflict.
- Assumptions bias within cultural values regarding ourselves and others rapidly surface under stress.

**The Feelings Conversation**

- Feelings are perceptions of events, which are negotiable with greater understanding.
- Feelings fuel our assumptions and bias behavior faster than we can consciously make choices.
- Understanding the feelings story you tell yourself and how it is the same or different from the one you tell others?

**Embracing Creative Conflict**

- The productivity and innovation of this D&I team soared.
- They all played a role in the conflict, it was equally important they share in the awareness and leadership around the solutions that strengthened the team.
First we got your brain...

Now we need your heart.

Can we count on you for a dollar?

The American Institute of Stress helps people learn to manage their stress every single day. We help veterans returning from war find a sense of normalcy again. We help students who are stressed about exams, busy schedules and bullies reach their fullest potential. And we help people like you deal with whatever life throws at you! With your ongoing support, we will continue to be there providing people with relief for today and hope for tomorrow.

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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.

The American Institute of Stress invites YOU to enhance your credentials with FAIS and add your name to our Gallery of Distinguished Fellows.

Over the last 35 years, we’ve expanded our services and broadened our reach, but our dedication to science hasn’t changed a bit.

Our four focus areas include:

We produce three e-magazines focused on different stress related topics...

Join us in our mission to Engage, Educate and Empower the global community with science based stress management information, tools and techniques so people can live happier, healthier and longer lives!

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