

Reducing Workday Stress

By Natalie Gahrmann, Success Coach/Speaker/Author

Everyone in the world of work seems to be carrying a heavier workload these days. Those who have survived massive layoffs, mergers and downsizings are left with the responsibility to keep things going despite all of the cutbacks.

People feeling overwhelmed and stressed out at work are less likely to handle a problem effectively. Adapting a negative attitude and convincing yourself that nothing will help is very destructive. Instead, keep things in perspective, slowly take a deep breath, and focus your energy on other more productive solutions to the problems at hand. Sometimes you can't change a situation; however, you always have the power to change how you think about it, how you feel about it, and how you respond. Take control of your life at work and you'll feel more in control of your overall life.

We all experience some type of stress at work, whether it's a difficult boss or a looming deadline. Here are 20 ways to stay calm when your job is anything but:

1. RECLAIM WASTED TIME AT WORK

I'm sure you've probably heard the expression, "work smarter not harder". Alleviate or eliminate your biggest time wasters at work and use your time to get more accomplished during the course of your normal work day.

2. AVOID SUPERFLOUS MULTITASKING

When multitasking you are not fully focusing on any of the activities you are completing. You can multitask mindless activities but save your focused energy for tasks that are distinct and different so that your brain can properly reason, plan and process the information.

3. ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY TASKS

List all the tasks you spend time on and determine which ones are not essential. Move past your belief that everything you do is essential and decide which are not really important anymore. Examine the processes and procedures you use to accomplish your end results. Seek out more efficient means to accomplish your desired outcomes. Shorten your processes.

4. MANAGE YOUR STRESS

Practice effective habits for minimizing and managing the stress you experience at work. You can more effectively manage work-related stresses if you quit worrying; stop hurrying; define your limits; get feedback; manage your time; resolve conflicts; limit distractions; keep your skills up-to-date; and, breathe.

5. STOP OVERWORKING

Overwork is a growing problem. Stop sacrificing the quality of your life and putting high demands on yourself. You will continue suffering from overwork unless you are willing to make a firm decision to stop. Start setting firmer boundaries, delegating, and saying "no" more often to the many requests of your time. Allow yourself to take a mental-health break from time-to-time as needed. Work smarter!

6. STAY IN THE MOMENT

Avoid getting caught in the trap of thinking about all the other things you need to do when you finish what you are doing now. Each task will be completed more quickly and efficiently if you focus solely on it instead of at the same time worrying about what else you need to do, about the situation in general, and about whose fault it all is.

7. BE IN CONTROL OF YOUR OWN LIFE

When you start feeling like a victim you relinquish control of your life to someone else. Once you start being a victim you adopt a role of helplessness. Take control of your life and take responsibility to change it if you're not happy with the way things are going. Attend to your personal and professional needs; take breaks.

8. DELEGATE

Important work that needs to get accomplished may be better off completed by someone else. Decide if there is anything that can be delegated, or that more fairly belongs to someone else's work load and redistribute the workload. Be sure to also delegate the accountability and empower them to complete the job. Provide adequate instruction and guidance when delegating to someone else. Don't try to control every issue or project at work.

9. BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Help determine viable solutions to problems rather than just pointing them out. Suggest alternatives to your boss and team leaders. Don't look for others to solve your problems for you.

10. KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE.

Avoid blowing things out of proportion. Keep in mind that workloads are often cyclical and that the hectic schedule may be a temporary condition and not the way things will always be if you continue at this job. Decide what you can legitimately put aside for now to catch up on later when things slow down a bit later.

11. LEAVE YOUR WORK STRESS AT WORK.

Although it may be difficult, if you can master leaving work stress at work and home stress at home, you'll be in much better shape.

12. REMIND YOURSELF WHY YOU CHOSE YOUR JOB

If you're feeling trapped in your job, think about the reasons you chose this job, career field, or company to work for. If it has become very different than you anticipated, do you still choose it? If not, begin updating your resume and networking with colleagues. If on the other hand, you choose to stay, remember that you are there by choice, which must mean that in some way the positives still outweigh the negatives. Focus on the positives!

13. GIVE YOURSELF A PEP TALK

Part of being composed is knowing that you can handle whatever is thrown your way. Compile a list of your top skills and accomplishments to remind yourself how capable you are. Use positive affirmations rather than negative self-talk throughout the day.

14. TAKE A DEEP BREADTH

As stress levels increase, most people breathe short shallow breadths. We unknowingly may even stop breathing for several seconds or more. Smooth, deep steady breathing through the nose is one of the easiest ways to stimulate calmer energy.

15. DE-CLUTTER YOUR WORKSPACE

A cluttered desk and work area zaps a lot of energy and leads to unnecessary stress. Take a couple of minutes at the end of the work day to clear your work surface and organize your area. Have a place designated to store everything where it can be easily found.

16. GET ADEQUATE SLEEP

Numerous studies show that most people don't get enough sleep nightly. Although many studies recommend seven hours minimum, eight to ten hours can be even more beneficial. Be cautious not to rely on sleep remedies or medications to help you fall asleep or stay asleep because many of these are habit-forming.

17. BACK-UP YOUR FILES

If you spend any time of your day working on a computer, be sure to back up your work frequently. This will help avoid frustration and wasted time to recoup lost work. Many larger companies back-up the entire system nightly and store backup copies off-site. Even if your company doesn't perform this measure, be sure to routinely back-up your own work and store it away from your desk in case of fire, theft, or hard-drive issues.

18. EXERCISE REGULARLY

Regular exercise is an essential component of any stress and wellness plan. Be sure to get your doctor's approval before embarking on any exercise program. Combine exercise with eating healthy to boost your well-being. Studies indicate that regular exercise boosts brain-nurturing chemicals, producing serotonin and improving your reaction time, creativity and memory retention.

19. GO WITH THE FLOW

Rather than treating every setback as a catastrophe or spending time worrying about what might or might not happen, accept things for what they are. Focus your energy on controlling your efforts—not the outcome. By devoting your full attention to the situation within reach, you will feel more relaxed and in control.

20. GET SPIRITUAL

Connect with nature and your spirituality. Regardless of what higher power you do or don't believe in, research indicates that people who believe in and regularly pray and express gratitude are better able to cope with crises. Five minutes of sunshine or fresh air can help clear your head and give you a fresh perspective.

About the Author:

Natalie Gahrmann is an internationally certified professional coach and work/life expert who works with organizations to underscore the causes of stress and productivity issues and teach their employees how to better self-manage their burgeoning workload – in all aspects of their lives. She delights in helping entrepreneurs, executives, and SuperBusySM Parents balance their work and personal life, achieve better results, and create more fulfillment and congruency in their life.

She is the author of the award winning, *Succeeding as a Super Busy Parent* and *Tools for Creating Success, Fulfillment and Balance in your Work, Family and Personal Life*. Natalie has helped thousands of people at every level of the business manage the complexities of life's challenges through individual & group coaching, workshops & keynote presentations, on-line advice, a monthly column in *Moms Business Magazine*, and her free e-newsletter (which you can subscribe to at www.theprioritypro.com). She is a contributing expert for *Parenting Magazine*, *BlueSuitMom*, *iVillage*, and *MyPath*. She has been featured in a number of articles and on TV and radio in the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK.

To learn more about how coaching can help you or to arrange an introductory coaching session, contact natalie@theprioritypro.com. To subscribe to our free bi-weekly e-newsletter, visit our website, www.theprioritypro.com.