

Psychotherapy to Reduce Stress

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Many will think that stress is more relevant when we were working and has no relevance after retirement since we have a whale of a time at our disposal.

To cite my personal example: The Bank was paying my salary for 481 months till I retired. Till such time I did not have BP. A few months after my retirement a Doctor diagnosed I have BP and should take tablet for the rest of my life.(My earlier annual check ups did not show any BP). I had an accident which dented my spinal cord . The ortho surgeon said, there is no healing possible; take rest if it pains; Fine.

Then my eye doctor, after a series of tests and scans, diagnosed me with high pressure in the right eye for which I have to apply drops for the remaining period of my life. It is funny, past 60, and is like paying a tax on your vehicle for its entire life.

My friends Vanchi Prakash and Swaminathan, who retired along with me, do not have this suspense on how to define the term “rest of the life”, as God has applied the brakes and took them with him. Good as they are here, they will be treated well there also.

I am not advocating here departure as the only solution for the 60 plus. In 5 years from now, we will be constituting 20% of the Indian population. Many geriatric hospitals will be coming up as also total-care old age friendly residences either on rent or for sale.

Stress does not detach itself when one retires. New challenges and new solutions are around. So we NEED NOT WORRY.

Anyone familiar with "The Karate Kid" knows the power of "wax on, wax off." Young Daniel LaRusso learns that a simple household task, when done repeatedly, creates muscle memory that in turn helps his karate defensive skills.

The same effect happens with mental training. Edward Brown, author of *"The Time Bandit Solution,"* devised six psycho-therapeutic exercises he calls "psychological martial arts" that can train the mind to defend itself against stress-related shutdowns.

Brown's inspiration wasn't the schoolyard of bullies Daniel faced in "Karate Kid," but a much more solitary threat - a driving chamber. After getting the bends from scuba diving, Brown had to spend 24 hours encased in a tube, an unsavory prospect because he suffers from claustrophobia.

We aren't spending 24 hours in a metal box every day, but those hours could contain some stressful moments. Here are psycho-therapeutic methods that can calm the brain or at least help employees weather tough situations:

1. Constructive acceptance:

Go to any restorative yoga or meditation class, and they'll encourage you to create a mantra that will help you focus. Brown said he repeated the Serenity Prayer while in the metal box for treatment - "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference" - to change his thoughts of "I've got to get out of here" to "I have to stay in here, so let's make the best of it."

2. Transcend the environment:

If mantras were a little hippy-dippy for you, Brown's next step is going to seem really out there. "My body was in the chamber, but my mind was in the cosmos," he said, explaining that by picturing planet Earth, he was able to trick his mind into ignoring his encasement. When a crisis hits, we don't have 24 hours to spend floating up in space. But we can find a mental image that helps get through stress. For me, that image is my Hill Temple at Palani which I used to climb in 5 minutes many time in a week. That is solitary and just the kind of peaceful place I need sometimes.

3. Meditative relaxation:

Brown said he counted to eight during each inhale and exhale, a technique I've done in almost every meditation and yoga class. If anything, it centers you on something other than what's freaking you out.

4. Positive self-visualization:

While in the tank, Brown imagined his mother telling him he would survive the experience.

Like transcending the environment, when we are facing a deadline or crisis probably we don't have time to imagine a conversation with a loved one. But I've found tough moments can improve just by having a photo of my family or friends within eye's reach on my desk. It's a nice reminder that someone's rooting for me.

5. Counter punches:

Anytime doubt creeps up - "I can't do this," "This is too hard," etc. - Brown suggests a method he learned from Muhammad Ali. Return every nagging thought in your head with a mental counter punch of "Yes I can."

6. Reprogram your computer chip.

The way we react to stressful situations is something that's engrained in us, right? "I knew as a child I had claustrophobia," Brown said. Acknowledging that part of his makeup made it easier to overcome it, or at least subdue it for nine hours.

These mind tricks might not seem like hard science, and in many ways they aren't. That doesn't mean there's no validity to them. Yogis have been using meditative relaxation for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The Serenity Prayer has been embroidered, carved and painted onto household decorations since the 1940s, not to mention acts as a mantra for Alcoholics Anonymous.

So before waxing on poetically about whether psychotherapy has a legitimate place at work, wax off some of that skepticism. It might not be your cup of stress-reducing tea, but if it helps, isn't that enough?

7. Recall Office Humour

It happened in 1974 at our Head Office on a Monday morning . The Chairman on seeing a DGM and a 21 year young man (me) waiting for lift, said in his inimitable way “come along”. With little hesitation (who wants to accompany a VIP?) and no alternative, we got into the lift. The non-nonsense chairman that he was, he wanted to pick up a thread on the discussion on branch expansion he had with the DGM on Saturday evening. He said, “ look! You should reduce further.” The DGM looked at him touching his tummy, said, Sir, I have already reduced. The boss could not resist his smile, and said “I am not talking about your tummy, but about the branch expansion program for the next year. The lift reached the destination and the joke also reached many ears in HO shared by the good humoured DGM himself.

Recall office humour like this and also your follies which led to such funny situations.

When I was a rural branch Manager for the first time, I took over a few days ago, my clerk told me that one NPA borrower is coming and you should shout at him and send him to me. I will use your shouting to recover from him since I am in this branch for 8 years. Unfortunately the Manager's cabin had 2 entrances . The first one who entered witnessed my lung power. I just turned around with pride and saw through the glass my clerk beating his head in disgust. While the man was in another man came through another entrance, was there hearing my shouting and slipped away. I asked my clerk whether I have performed as expected. He coolly said, Sir, you shouted at the wrong person. However the other person who was hearing you shout came to me and paid the arrears. Then I asked, who is the person I have been shouting at? My clerk coolly replied, if he comes again I will tell Sir.

[Based on an article by Kate Everson, Chief Learning Officer]

