

**Melt Your Stress:
32 Science-Based Strategies to
Boost Your Health and Happiness**



Carlsbad, CA USA

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About Sandi Leyva

Sandi Leyva brings a scientific foundation to the world of business coaching and leadership. Her work blends 25 years of business experience with brand new discoveries from neuroscience about how we think and achieve, producing a one-of-a-kind training and coaching experience that unleashes breakthrough behavior change for business entrepreneurs and executives who want to take their businesses and their lives to the highest level possible.

Sandi doesn't just coach high-performance; she lives it: She is one of a handful of women in the world who has co-piloted a tiny six-seat, single-engine airplane over the oceans and around the world. Her book, *Following Amelia: A Modern Day 'Round-the-World Flight*, describes her death-defying adventure along with the two award-winning humanitarian trips she managed to fit in along the way. Having visited 100 countries to date, Sandi loves exploring and discovering how people and cultures all over the globe live, work, think and achieve.

Sandi is recognized as the coaches' coach. Her distinctive work is based in cognitive neuroscience which unlocks the door to high performance and limitless success through dramatic behavior change without defensiveness or resistance. Never before has material from neuroscience, psychology, quantum physics, marketing, and business leadership been integrated this way. Her methods have boosted entrepreneurs' business profits, revitalized customer service, ignited employee engagement, and restored stalled relationships, to name a few. Clients share that her marketing strategies have generated them millions of dollars over the years. Her mission is to translate the brilliant science that's hidden in the research labs (and funded by your tax dollars, by the way) into clear, practical, and actionable answers that help people break free from limiting behaviors so they can live more successful, fulfilling lives.

With 25 combined years in Fortune 500 management and as a woman business owner, Sandi is known for her bottom-line business focus, her positive feminine leadership approach, and a straightforward communication style. More than 100,000 people have read her books and articles, used her training and coaching tools, or heard her speak at conferences. She has written four books and over 500 articles for clients such as Microsoft, Intuit, and the American Institute for CPAs.

Sandi is a CPA and holds an MBA in IT from the University of Dallas. She also holds a MS in Applied Cognition and Neuroscience, earned in 2007 with a perfect 4.0 grade point. She is also an Aggie (a graduate of Texas A&M University), but please don't hold that against her.

Introduction

Daily stress has become as commonplace as apple pie and the American flag. It's part of our 21st century lifestyles, and many factors contribute to increasing our stress to unhealthy levels. **But a new dangerous trend started in 2009 that brings new urgency to the problem of stress: it now affects our kids.** We can't ignore this epidemic any longer, and this book is your call to action. With this information, you'll be able to take control and manage your stress better than ever before. And hopefully, we can begin to reverse this trend.

Let's take a look at some statistics so that we can understand the scope and importance of dealing with stress. According to The American Institute of Stress: About 33 percent of people report feeling extreme stress. 77 percent of people experience stress that affects their physical health. 73 percent of people have stress that impacts their mental health. Here are more stats from the AIS:

- 83% of US workers suffer from work-related stress.
- US businesses lose up to \$300 billion yearly as a result of workplace stress.
- Stress causes around one million workers to miss work every day.
- Only 43% of US employees think their employers care about their work-life balance.
- Depression leads to \$51 billion in costs due to absenteeism and \$26 billion in treatment costs.
- Work-related stress causes 120,000 deaths and results in \$190 billion in healthcare costs yearly.

Stress hits women harder than men. More women than men report high levels of stress. Their top three concerns are money, the economy, and housing costs. More women than men say family responsibilities and health problems are stressors. Stress keeps 52 percent of women up at night. Stress also causes 52 percent of women to overeat. And 37 percent of women lack willpower to make the lifestyle changes needed to manage their stress better.

Whether you have your own business or work for someone else, each situation has its own set of challenges and stressors. **It's imperative that we stop ignoring stress and start implementing solutions that will lower our stress to tolerable levels so that we can cope, thrive, and even enjoy our lives once again.**

In this course, we'll present many solutions you can implement to reduce stress in a variety of situations, including your work environment.

□ Why We Should Reduce Stress

Stress, along with fear and worry, is a negative emotion. To reduce stress, one of our goals will be to increase the amount of positive emotions we have and decrease the amount of negative emotions we feel.

Stress is extremely detrimental to your body. The chemicals released from stress kill brain cells, so we can end up making bad decisions, which in turn cause more stress. Many bodily pains such as back pain can be attributed to high levels of stress. A number of diseases are made worse by stress: heart disease, to name one.

Our stress system misfires in the 21st century because it was designed for cave man days. When our ancestors saw a saber-toothed tiger, their stress responses kicked in to keep them alive. Their bodies shut off all unnecessary systems: digestive, reproduction, etc. It diverted all resources to running or fighting. Adrenaline and cortisol, two very poisonous chemicals, coursed through their bodies so our ancestors could save their own lives.

In today's office, we're running into saber-toothed tigers all day long. The boss, deadlines, uncooperative coworkers, customers who are late, sick kids, and grouchy spouses all trigger our stress systems. Our brain, where all this happens, can't tell the difference between a saber-toothed tiger or the daily "threats" in the 21st century. The "fight or flight" system pours stress chemicals in our body, thinking it needs to keep us alive.

Daily stress is just as harmful or more harmful than smoking, being overweight, and many other unkind health habits. Here are just a few of stress's dozens of symptoms:

- Frequent headaches
- Jaw clenching, grinding teeth
- Insomnia
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tremors
- Back aches, neck ache, muscle spasms
- Frequent crying spells
- Rashes, hives
- Dry mouth
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Frequent colds or infections
- Adrenal exhaustion, constant tiredness, fatigue
- Overreaction, irritability, anger, frustration, hostility, violence
- Heartburn, stomach pain, nausea, leaky gut, constipation, diarrhea
- Accidents

- Obsessive or compulsive behavior
- Allergies
- Asthma
- Chest pain, palpitations
- Panic attacks, excess anxiety, worry, nervousness, guilt
- Lies or excuses, excessive defensiveness
- Stammering, stuttering, mumbled speech
- Social withdrawal, isolation
- Unexplained weight gain or loss
- Depression
- Increased addictive behavior, gambling, smoking, drugs, alcohol

Because they manifest in a variety of ways, doctors have trouble diagnosing illnesses when these symptoms arise. The good news is there are many tools you can use to take charge of your life and reduce your stress levels. In this course, we'll cover four major categories of stress-reducing solutions:

1. Positivity tools from the fields of positive psychology, social, cognitive, and affective neuroscience, and Eastern psychology. These make a huge difference when applied correctly, and we promise not to mention Pollyanna once.
2. Resilience, a brand new field which will revolutionize your thinking.
3. Self-care, including new ideas about sleep, nutrition, and me-time.
4. Relaxation, which is probably the most important of all, and includes breathing techniques, mindfulness, meditation, and biofeedback, a tremendously overlooked tool that has been nothing short of miraculous for me personally.

In Chapter One: Ahhh, Serenity, we'll introduce over a dozen activities you can bring into your life to reduce stress and other negative emotions and to increase the amount of positivity in your life. Even if you consider yourself a positive person, I encourage you to intentionally begin practicing positivity in your life so that you can benefit from an increase in your emotional well-being.

Chapter Two: De-Stress Your Schedule will provide you with a how-to guide to add the activities you learned in Chapter One into your daily routine. In Chapter Three: De-Stress Your Environment, we present a step-by-step approach to transform your environment from stressful to supportive. And Chapter Four: De-Stress Your Relationships will show you how to build and benefit from a supportive community of positive individuals.

In Chapter Five: De-Stress Your Thoughts, we introduce some of our favorite tools that reside in the field of resilience and that we use with our VIP coaching clients. These are primarily coping tools that will help you better balance the emotional and logical components of your brain so that your stress level goes down. Interestingly, scientists

and executives have wondered for decades how some people are able to bounce back from adversity faster than others, and these tools are the answer.

Chapter Six: De-Stress Your Body reminds you briefly that exercise, nutrition, and sleep are important components of an overall stress-reduction program. Then we get into some of the more fun ways to practice self-care, but without the big price tag that usually accompanies expensive vacations and spa stays.

Chapter Seven: Beautify Your Brain takes us into advanced class. It further refines the work started in Chapter Five and helps you take your consciousness to a new level, if you desire. You'll not only reduce your stress, but you'll gain clarity and direction for a more powerful and meaningful existence.

□ **Your 30-Day Stress-Free Plan**

Within 30 days, you'll have implemented many of the ideas in this book, and you should begin to see a difference in your life. We have two plans for you to follow, depending on whether you like to take small daily bites or big weekly chunks.

Daily Calendar

If you prefer a day-by-day activity guide, then check out Appendix A on page 95, where we have one tool listed for you to read about and implement each day for 30 days.

Weekly Schedule

Here's a weekly guide for your stress-free plan:

Week One – Days 1-7 – De-Stress Your Activities

Read Chapters One and Two. Be sure to do the exercise in Chapter Two about listing your activities. We'll come back to it every week to add more ideas.

Start implementing the tools in Chapter One. Try at least one per day this week.

Week Two – Days 8-14 – De-Stress Your Environment

Read Chapter Three and implement the ideas you came up with for your environment. Implement one small change every day.

Week Three – Days 15-21 – De-Stress Your Relationships and Your Thoughts

Stick with it. Give yourself a nudge if you're falling behind and get back on track. After all, your health matters!

Read Chapters Four and Five and implement the tools in these chapters. Complete the social circles exercise by day 16, and work on the tools in Chapter Five in the last half of the week.

Week Four – Days 22- 28 – Self-Care and Advanced Class

Read Chapters Six and Seven and implement the tools in these chapters. These chapters are the most fun to implement, so I will leave it to you to plan the details of your implementation.

Bonus Days – Days 29- 30 – Fine-Tuning Your Plan

This is your chance to go back over any chapters or tools you might have missed in the first go-round. Your goal is to get to a stress-free life you love, so in this final stretch, pull out any tools you loved reading about but haven't done yet. Congratulate yourself for a job well done.

Choose Weekly or Daily

Now choose which way you want to go through this book. If you choose daily, then jump to Appendix A now, and let it be your daily de-stress guide. If you choose weekly, then start with Chapter One and progress chapter by chapter until you are complete.

Okay, let's get de-stressed!

Chapter One: Ahh, Serenity

When we think of reducing stress, we think of traditional solutions like a massage, the beach, or a yoga class. What I hope to do is greatly expand your repertoire of stress-busting tools, and I'd like to start with a whole class of practices that are not normally associated with stress.

Because chronic stress is a negative emotion, it makes sense that we can bolster our experience of positive emotions to counteract it. And, in fact, the science holds up that when we have more positive activities in our lives that boost our positive emotions, our stress goes down.

The surprise for many people is that you can control your emotions at all. You can do so indirectly, by affecting your thoughts, activities, environment, and people you hang with. When you can be intentional about bringing positive thoughts, activities, and environmental changes into your life, you can quantum-leap your life from languishing to flourishing.

This chapter will draw from the relatively new field of positive psychology and introduce you to 12 positivity practices and exactly how you can implement them. I encourage you to have an open mind. If you're really stressed or a really negative person like I used to be, these ideas could sound lame at first. But studies cite evidence that positive emotions:

1. Help you think clearer by broadening your cognition, attention, and action,
2. Undo lingering negative emotions,
3. Fuel psychological resistance, and
4. Build psychological resistance and enhance emotional well-being.¹

Work done by John Gottman, Barbara Fredrickson, and Marcial Losada proves that if you broke down your day into chunks of positive and negative activities and computed a ratio of how many positive interactions you experience divided by how many negative interactions you have, you can tell if you are languishing or thriving in life.

1. If you have more negative interactions than positive interactions, you're languishing and losing ground in life. You might also be at risk for increased stress levels and possibly depression.
2. If you have an equal number of positive and negative interactions, you're still languishing.
3. If you have twice as many positive interactions as negative interactions, you're still languishing because our negative emotions are more intensely felt than our positive emotions.

4. If you have at least three positive interactions for every one negative interaction, you're flourishing.

Here's an example. Let's say you get stood up for a phone appointment. Most people would say that's a negative since it likely makes you feel unimportant, costs money, or takes up precious time handling the rescheduling. Then you get an email from a client saying that she got eight new clients from your coaching. That's a positive. You open the window and admire the fresh air and the flowers. That's another positive. You finish a big project on time. That's a third positive. Since you just experienced three positives for one negative, you're flourishing.

I realize you're not going to go through your day counting your activities, and I realize that we have kept it super-simple by not addressing the relative intensity or weight of each interaction. The point is not to keep score; it's to keep introducing positive interactions in your day. Once you create your life to have three or more positives to every one negative, on average, you enter the realm of flourishing, and your life will start to click into place.

You can change your life and even your personality to become more positive, and therefore, less stressful. There are four areas of your life you can impact with these ideas:

1. Your thoughts
2. Your activities
3. Your environment
4. The people you surround yourself with

In Chapters Two through Four, we'll show you step by step how to impact your daily activities, change your environment, and choose positive people to be around. In this chapter and subsequent chapters, we'll give you tips on how you can change your thoughts to be more positive and less negative.

When you immerse yourself in a positive world, your stress will go down, your body and brain will work better, and you'll be more likely to see and implement solutions to the challenges and problems in your life that are stressing you in the first place.

Here's the list of tools that we'll cover in this chapter:

- Reframing
- Gratitude
- Acts of kindness
- Expressions of positive emotions
- Focusing on your strengths
- Flow

- Goals and connecting with purpose
- Savoring
- Laughter
- Nature
- Music
- Faith

□ Reframing

If you saw a group of women crying outside a church, what situation would you think they were in? Some people say a funeral. Others say a wedding. Reframing is looking at a situation from another angle or perspective that is more objective, less judgmental, and often more positive.

Reframing is a psychological term that requires you to “reframe” or adjust your thinking, to take a different perspective, and to see a bigger picture outside of yourself. It’s taking a look at something, someone, or an event or action from new or multiple angles. Optimism is a form of reframing, but it’s often misunderstood, so I prefer the term reframing.

Our brain often looks at things in our lives as threats, and frames them accordingly. When we can use reframing, it can often lighten our mood, lower our stress, and increase our positive emotions.

In the workplace, great entrepreneurs reframe their perspective by putting themselves in the shoes of their customers to solve the problem. At home, before firing back at your spouse, you might first think about how they feel and where they’re coming from. Maybe they had a really rough day.

Reframing initially affects your thinking, but also cascades into your actions and especially how you interact with people. Great reframers can solve problems better, are more creative, and benefit from their positive outlook. People want to be around people who are positive; they don’t want to be around people who are always stressed.

Here are some examples of common situations and how you can give a person the benefit of the doubt through reframing:

Situation	Reframe
A client is unhappy.	Listen objectively and discover ideas to improve your service or create an entirely new product.
A team member made an innocent mistake,	Here’s a chance to speak with the

but it made you look bad in front of the client.	customer, apologize, and strengthen the relationship and a chance to tighten up procedures so that your business is stronger.
A team member who made a sloppy mistake.	Here's a chance to practice your supervisory skills and show how mature you are in dealing with the team member.
A relative who has a habit that just gets on your nerves.	Idiosyncrasies are what make people themselves.
A vendor who got your order wrong.	Here's a chance to ask for a favor or compensation
When your spouse is watching TV and you are doing dishes/cleaning up from a big party, attending to the crying baby, and returning calls and emails in preparation for a big meeting at work. You ask them to help and they say let's do it in the morning.	The two of you have a different style of working; that's part of the personality package you love about your spouse. Or remember the last time your spouse did something to save you time or help you out.
A woman in the post office line complaining about the slow service and rising postage prices.	Feel gratitude that we have such an effective postal service compared to other countries where mail is often stolen and never reaches its destination.
A religious man who quotes you a scripture in response to something you said that is not religious and that is not what you believe.	It's great to see a person that is so passionate about her beliefs.
When you get together with someone you know and they talk and talk and talk and you never get a word in.	This person must be lonely; it's great you can fill a need.
When your spouse asks you to help with chores and you are right in the middle of a big game play on TV and you don't feel like helping.	The two of you have a different style of working; that's part of the personality package you love about your spouse. OR perhaps I need to better communicate how important this game is to my spouse.
When you have a friend who is negative.	That person may not know how to reframe.
When the traffic is a challenge.	Everyone is going the same place as you are. Leave earlier, plan more time, find a great CD or audio book to listen to, or practice happiness while you are waiting.

There may be times when reframing is not the right tool to use. Using reframing, like optimism, does not mean you should let people walk over you while you passively lie there. For example, when a client doesn't pay their invoice on time, this action requires

swift counteraction, not reframing. And only you can make the personal choice as to whether reframing is right for a certain situation.

Generally, a great time to use reframing is when someone in your life is being a complete grouch: emotionally setting you off, but otherwise harmless. Before acting out of sheer emotion, take a deep breath and think about reframing the situation.

1. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Where in the world are they coming from?
2. Put yourself one month in the future. In one month, how important will this be?
3. Put yourself at a completely different location. If you're in your favorite beach location, how would you respond differently?
4. Put yourself a few months from your last days on earth. Now, how would you see this situation?

The answers to these questions will help you clarify and craft a more powerful response than reacting out of a stress-filled outburst. Come up with your own questions and make this your own process to use to benefit your life.

What can you learn from the event when you take a different perspective? You can use reframing to anticipate and avoid blow-ups with people you work with and those you love.

Here's an exercise in reframing that you can do to get started using it. List the last five challenges you had at work that caused you to experience high stress or negative emotions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now, see if you can reframe each of them:

1. _____
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

What did you learn from applying reframing in your situations?

Think of ways to use reframing in your business to lower your stress, and make some notes as to how you'll incorporate these ideas into your work routine.

Now, let's go to the next positivity tool.

Gratitude

Gratitude is an instant mood-changer. It's easy to underestimate its power; I urge you to try it out and see for yourself before you dismiss it. Within a few weeks of practicing gratitude, you will see a noticeable change in your overall positivity level.

Interestingly, gratitude is a form of reframing, so you already know how to do it. It works because it requires you to see a bigger picture outside of yourself.

Definition

Gratitude is a conscious awareness of what other living beings have done and are doing for you. It's not an obligation in any way. For the highest benefit, your feelings of gratitude:

- Must flow freely
- Require a touch of humility
- Reflect a recognition of interconnectedness
- Show an acknowledgement of goodness

Gratitude is motivating; once you get started, you may be moved to share it with the world.

Benefits

Here are some scientific benefits of gratitude related to your health.

- Grateful people enjoy higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction, vitality, optimism and lower levels of depression and stress; however they do not deny or ignore the negative aspects of life. They have the capacity to be empathic and to take the perspective of others. They are rated as more generous and more helpful by people in their social networks.²
- Those who kept gratitude journals on a weekly basis exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives as a whole, were more likely to have made progress toward important personal goals (academic, interpersonal and health-based), and were more optimistic about the upcoming week.³
- A daily gratitude exercise resulted in higher positive states of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy. They were more likely to report having helped someone with a personal problem or having offered emotional support to another.
- Grateful people are more likely to attend religious activities, acknowledge a belief in the interconnectedness of all life, and confirm a commitment to and responsibility to others.⁴
- Grateful individuals place less importance on material goods; they are less likely to judge, less envious, and are more likely to share.

Gratefulness and feeling indebted to others are not the same.

Blocks to Gratitude

You could be blocked from benefiting from gratitude if you feel any of these:

- Entitlement
- Resentment
- Wanting something back
- Taking things for granted
- Scarcity vs. abundance thinking

Check your feelings to see if any of these are getting in the way of your experience of pure gratitude.

Practicing Gratitude

If gratitude is not already part of your work life and your habits, add it! Here are a few ideas to try so that gratitude can become an ingrained habit for you.

Your gratitude list – Make a list of things in your business you are grateful for. Think about them throughout the day.

Gratitude in your environment – Is there something in your environment that you use every day that you can acknowledge? Perhaps it's software, hot water, a favorite CD, email, a nice vendor, or a piece of clothing that keeps you warm. Acknowledge the item and trace back the people who brought that item into your life: the manufacturer, the inventor, the store clerk, the delivery driver, the mailperson, etc. Isn't it amazing how many people were involved in that one item that gives you so much pleasure? Treasure that item all day long.

Gratitude practice – Follow one of the gratitude practices listed on this site <https://gratefulness.org/practice/practices-grateful-living/>. Release any tension that is holding you back from being relaxed and feeling grateful. Or read a chapter from a gratitude book you have acquired.

Gratitude for the people in your life – Think of a person in your business that you are grateful for and why. What do they contribute to your life? Who are they to you? What characteristics do you like about this person? Call them and pay them a compliment or tell them how you feel and what your friendship means to you.

Grateful for being human – We forget how amazing our own bodies are. Here's an exercise to help us remember and to honor ourselves. Discover a part of your body that you are grateful for and honor it all day. If you chose your hair, go to a stylist or try a new "do" yourself. If you chose your feet, take them on a fun walk, have a pedicure, or try reflexology. Think about everything this body part has done for you, has experienced with you, what it means to you and what would happen if you didn't have it.

Expansion – Think of how your gratitude practices help to put other issues of your life into perspective. Is there something in your business right now you need to get perspective on? Is there a problem you are going through right now that you can reframe into a lesson that you will grow from and come out more powerful on the other side? Is there a little thing that is bugging you that you can become amused about instead?

Giving back – Do something today that someone will thank you and be grateful for. Consider practicing tonglen, a Buddhist meditation: breathing in the worries of the world and giving out love and gratitude.

If you have kids, denote a gratitude day, such as Wednesdays, so that everyone can focus on and practice their gratitude intentionally that day. Kids love playing games like these. Make this part of the morning routine and watch your stress go down. (You can also do this at work with your employees.)

Lasting gratitude takes awareness, thoughtfulness, and commitment.

Make some notes below as to how you'll begin incorporating gratitude in your business.

Acts of Kindness

The social connections we have in our lives are paramount to our health and happiness, and practicing acts of kindness is one of many ways we can more deeply connect and nurture others. When we perform acts of kindness for others, we feel better ourselves.

When you do something for another person that is not required, they feel grateful, and you receive that gratitude. Plus, you feel better yourself as it opens your soul. You feel good. You feel needed. You feel happy. Your soul is nourished.

Interestingly, when you are a recipient of a kind act, you often tend to “pay it forward,” as beautifully demonstrated in the 2000 movie of the same name.

Here are some examples of acts of kindness:

1. Open a stranger's door for them when their hands are full.
2. Let someone who looks like they are in a hurry cut in line in front of you.
3. Be extra polite to wait staff, receptionists, and customer service agents.
4. Run an errand for someone.
5. Smile.
6. Change lanes to let someone pass who is following you too closely.
7. Buy a friend lunch.
8. Send a thank you card for no reason.
9. Write a nice testimonial for a vendor or employee you like.
10. Give a gift to a friend out of the blue.

As you can see, acts of kindness do not need to be time-consuming or expensive in order to reap the benefits.

Why It Works

Here are some reasons from research by Sonja Lyubomirski on why acts of kindness work:

1. It can “relieve guilt, distress, or discomfort over others’ difficulties and suffering.”
2. It allows you to feel good about the advantages you have in life.
3. It allows you to perceive others more positively and generously.
4. It creates a sense of community and interdependence.⁵

One of the biggest benefits of doing acts of kindness, Lyubomirski says, is how you change your perception of yourself. You begin to perceive yourself as a gentle and altruistic person. You feel more confident, optimistic, and useful.

The final benefit of acts of kindness is the increase in social capital that it brings you. People like you; people perceive you as good and generous. People will reciprocate when you have a need.

Of Your Own Volition

One important point is that kind acts need to be done voluntarily and freely. If you feel coerced or pressured to do a kind act, you will feel taken advantage of, and all of the good effects will be reversed. Individuals who give and give and give need to be extra careful not to give so much that they suffer from burnout and resentment. This is typically seen in caretaking professions and with moms, and can affect customer service workers as well.

The Recipient

Some recipients of your acts of kindness may not behave the way you expect. They may have trouble receiving. They may feel bad when receiving your gift. Take care to let go of any outcome you expect; when you expect something in return, it’s not really an act of kindness. You can never control another’s reaction.

One of my students recounted giving a homeless person her coat. The next time he saw him, he wasn’t wearing it, and that disappointed my student. My student felt duped: “Did he sell it for beer?” he wondered. If you place a constraint on how someone uses your gift, it’s not really a gift; the act of kindness is about you and not the homeless person. My student was judging his recipient and letting his ego get in the way of enjoying the pure act of giving. Be sure to perform your act of kindness without self-righteousness or condescension, Lyubomirski says.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a special, lengthened form of an act of kindness and has proved to have many benefits.

Many women volunteer for organizations such as NAWBO (National Association of Women Business Owners), serving on the Board of Directors or helping out at meetings. If women are expecting to get business from their involvement, this isn't volunteering; it's marketing. So be sure you realize the difference.

Don't use acts of kindness to lower stress if you are already time-pressured. It will be difficult to avoid resentment. If you feel this tool will be useful, think of ways you can use it to support what you're passionate about in life. You might be able to tie it to your business mission. For example, if your mission is helping women grow their businesses, then you could help groups that help woman business incubators or that encourage teen girls to study math and science. You could also fund a business college scholarship for senior girls.

Make some notes about what you'd like to volunteer to do, or simply how you'll squeeze a few acts of kindness into your day.

Expressions of Positive Emotions

In Barbara Fredrickson's book, *Positivity*, she defines ten positive emotions that we can experience to thrive:

1. Joy
2. Gratitude
3. Serenity
4. Interest
5. Hope
6. Pride
7. Amusement
8. Inspiration
9. Awe
10. Love.⁶

Look for a chance to experience these throughout your day. If you see that you haven't experienced one of these in a while, it might be time to intentionally tune back into some activities that you know have generated this emotion for you in the past.

For example, if you used to feel serenity after a dip in a pool, find a pool near you and carve out some time once a week to re-experience that feeling. If you lack amusement, rent a silly movie or head to your local theme park for some innocent laughs.

If you're at a loss as to how to re-generate one of the emotions listed above, then it's time for you to keep a journal on that emotion. For example, keep an "awe" journal: become hyper-aware of any times you may begin to feel a small tinge of "awe," and write down the trigger and the details. Do this for a week or two until you remember the feeling and can bring it back into your normal routine.

You may also want to have a "joy" day with your family, kids, or friends. This is where everyone participating thinks of and actively reports and shares their joy during the entire day. Joy gets front-row attention, and it's amply spread around to everyone's benefits. Kids love playing games like these and will help the adults find their joy again.

Here's an extended example using serenity to help you lower your stress.

Serenity

What gives you the feeling of serenity? Here are some examples:

- Coming home to a warm house and a cup of hot tea
- A walk on the beach or in your neighborhood
- Enjoying nature while gardening or sitting on a park bench
- A nap
- Curling up with a good book
- Walking the dog
- Being with friends and family
- Tucking your child into bed

Make your own list of experiences that bring you serenity.

Where can you add these in your daily routine to increase your feelings of serenity?

A second step is to ask yourself what's keeping you from feeling serene. Here are some ideas to get you started writing your own list.

- Trying to juggle everything and please everyone
- A goal you haven't achieved and are not making progress toward
- A client who may be overstepping your boundaries or who you are worried about
- _____
- _____
- _____

Next, ask yourself what steps you can take to reduce blocks to your serenity. Your solutions may include:

- Asking others for help,
- Removing someone challenging from your life, such as firing a non-performing employee,
- Saying no,
- Removing activities from your schedule that don't line up with your business mission, or
- Scheduling an activity that moves you toward a goal.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Taking both sets of actions will help permanently increase your serenity by reducing or eliminating your block.

Repeat this series of steps for each of the 10 positive emotions listed. You'll be well on your way to experiencing more positive emotions and less stress in your life.

Focusing on Your Strengths

How many times a day do we tell ourselves with the little voice in our head that we're falling short of the ideal we have for ourselves? "I forgot to add the salt, so I ruined the recipe." "I'm not good enough." "I was mistaken." "I'm not smart enough." "I didn't get picked for the finals." "Nobody likes me." And so on.

Instead, why don't we focus on our strengths? Chris Peterson underwent an extensive research project to discover 24 positive character strengths that each person has to varying degrees. They are:

Creativity	Persistence	Citizenship	Self-Control
Curiosity	Integrity	Fairness	Humor
Open-Mindedness	Vitality	Leadership	Appreciation of Beauty
Love of Learning	Love	Forgiveness	Gratitude
Perspective	Kindness	Humility	Hope
Bravery	Social intelligence	Prudence	Spirituality

You may or may not be familiar with the DSM: the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders. It is the standard encyclopedia of mental illnesses that is widely accepted among doctors and psychologists in the mental health field. It lists categories of illnesses such as schizophrenia and depression.

The people who birthed positive psychology, the study of mental wellness and flourishing, decided they needed a manual too. They decided to focus on character strengths as one way to measure and record mental wellness. The VIA (Values in Action) Survey of Character Strengths was developed to fill this need.

I'd highly recommend you take the free VIA Survey of Character Strengths at the University of Pennsylvania's Authentic Happiness web site: <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter>. The multiple-choice test will take less than 30 minutes and will rank your own strengths based on your answers. You'll learn what your top six strengths are.

As an aside, you can see there are many other tests that you might want to take in the testing center (the link shown above) to get to know yourself a little better.

Once you know your strengths, you'll be able to use them as a positivity filter in your life. For example, many people have curiosity as their top strength. If curiosity ranks high for you, spend a few days thinking about this trait, and notice how it manifests in your actions. You'll soon find yourself explaining your behavior by saying "I was just curious."

When you can seek out ways to bring curiosity, or whatever the top strength is for you, into your life more, such as through cooking a new dish, reading a new genre, or exploring a part of town you didn't know before, you will improve your emotions.

You may also be able to change your stress level by acknowledging and re-channeling your strengths. "I'm so curious that it looks like I accidentally committed to too many

things this month. I think I'll call one of them back and cancel so I can relax more and use my curiosity in a different way that doesn't increase my stress."

Take the strengths test, and study your results. List your top six strengths below:

Next, think about how your strengths manifest in your actions. Think also if they tend to stress you out as you fulfill them.

Ask yourself how you can use this information to enjoy your life more based on your strengths, and put that plan into action.

Flow

When you are successfully performing a task on which your mental state is fully concentrating, you are in a state of "flow," as discovered by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi. Flow is purely focused motivation and is pleasant and rewarding to its participant. It's a state we all strive to be in several times a day with work we love.

The good news about flow is that if we're in it, we aren't actively stressed at the same time. We can lose track of time as well as our surroundings when we are in flow. There is no multi-tasking in flow; it's a single-minded activity. The key is that our emotions are directed at the task in full energy with no distractions; it's a positive feeling.

The type of activities that get you into "flow" is a very individual preference. Some examples at work are writing, preparing a report, graphics work, designing anything, speaking to an audience, leading a group discussion, and discussing a project with a colleague. At home, flow is achieved mainly through hobbies such as gardening, hiking, playing a musical instrument, playing sports, and creating art.

Make a list of all the things that you really like doing at home and work where you tend to "lose" yourself. These activities should be challenging, enjoyable, and absorbing.

Studying the activities listed above, is there a way you can spend more time on these activities? I realize this could be a complicated question. It's possible there are some tasks that you do now that you don't get into flow with that may be able to be delegated or automated, which would free up your time for more flow activities.

It might be that you could re-design your job or services so that you have more flow activities to do. This is a highly strategic solution that has many ramifications, but is worth considering.

There is another set of activities worth looking into. Are there activities that you would get into the flow with but that you don't because of time pressures? List these:

These tasks may be worth moving around on your schedule, or changing your project plan so that you can enjoy "flow" more often. It's worth a look, because you will be able to do a more creative job with better solutions when you are in flow than when you are pressured for time.

One of the big changes I've made as much as possible in my business is to move most of my services from hourly billing to package prices. In that way, I don't have to track time and I can get into flow without worrying about timesheets. This requires some serious time-tracking at first, though, so that you can accurately estimate your costs and charge a profitable fee.

Create a plan to ensure you are in "flow" during a healthy chunk of every day. You cannot be in flow and stressed at the same time, so your stress will subside greatly.

□ **Goals and Connecting with Your Purpose**

According to SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), 78 percent of businesses fail because they lack a well-developed business plan. The first step to planning is to set goals so that you know where you're going. And believe it or not, studies show that goal-setting helps to reduce stress.

Benefits of Goals

Goal-setting helps us achieve positivity and reduces stress. When we have something in our lives we are working toward, our positivity is greatly enhanced.

Studies show us that having goals, working toward them, and minimizing conflict toward those goals help a person be happier.^{7,8}

Happiness grows from progress toward goals and involvement in activities that the subject values.^{9,10,11}

Positive emotions are related to past fulfillment of goals, the value of the goal, and the effort required to reach the goal. Negative emotions decrease if the goal is perceived to be more attainable, there is less ambivalence around the goal, and less conflict between goals. Life satisfaction, a longer-term version of happiness, is related to the presence of an important goal, the importance of striving, expectations of success, and low conflict between strivings.^{12,13}

A later study¹⁴ clarified that the actual experience of pursuing and attaining one's goals (and not an initial optimistic outlook) is what contributes to positive emotional change.

Setting Goals

We know how to set goals because we do it every day whether we realize it or not. When we get in the car, we always know where we're going. That's a mini-goal. When we go to the grocery store, we buy ingredients for the meals we've planned. Each meal is a goal. At work, we have goals to get to work on time, return calls and emails within 24 hours, and to get our work done.

You can set goals with your children's behavior, and you can set goals for spending time with your spouse. You can also set revenue and spending goals in your business.

To benefit from this stress reducer, the goals you set should have certain characteristics. Here is what the science studies say about what the goal should be like:

- Be important to you.

- Be set by you and not by your boss, spouse, child, or mother-in-law. In other words, they need to be self-concordant (set by you, self-directed, and you take ownership of them).^{15,16}
- Include an intrinsic component, such as a community contribution, personal growth, emotional intimacy, and cultural value.¹⁷
- Not create too much conflict.
- Not be too difficult, as perceived by you.

And you should:

- Like the activities you need to do to make progress on the goal.
- Keep working toward the goal.
- See progress.
- See value in progress.
- Expect to achieve the goal.
- Celebrate at the end.¹⁸

Let's take an example. Sarah is working on her business this year, trying a lot of new things. She has decided to start speaking and has created a workshop. She discussed her goal with her coach, and her coach encouraged her to get 50 people in the workshop. Sarah would be happy to get 10, but sets the goal at 50 for her coach. Sarah markets the workshop to all of the people she knows, and 15 people sign up. Sarah is disappointed.

What happened? Sarah's goal did not meet the stress-reducing criteria above. It likely increased her stress and dissatisfaction. Her goal was not her own, it was her coach's. Any goal you set should be owned by you. The goal should not be too difficult and not create too much conflict. Sarah did not expect to achieve the goal. All of these factors contributed to a goal that was too difficult and stressful.

Let's say Sarah really enjoyed conducting the workshop with the 15 people, so she held a second. This time, she hopes to sign up 25. (She fires her coach.) She markets it aggressively and signs up 35. Sarah is delighted. The goal was exceeded, but more so, it was her own, it was achievable, and it was conflict-free. Sarah's second workshop was much less stressful than the first.

Once you have a goal in mind, think about when you'd like to achieve it and how you will get started. Write it down and make a plan of what you'll need to meet your goal.

Having Fun Seeing the Progress

Then, for an added stress-reliever, track and celebrate your progress toward the goal. You might have seen the drawing of a large thermometer on the wall that measures how much money a nonprofit organization has raised during a campaign. The temperature

gets colored in red and rises as more money is raised. Use a similar device in your office – perhaps a big poster – that will allow you to track the progress of your project.

This is fun for the entire office and will help you see how much you've accomplished.

A Note About Stress Created by Time Pressure

This is a good place to talk about how we are stressed by all the things we need to get done. We can set amazing goals but not have time to get them all done, which makes us feel terrible. This is a topic that many women come to me for private coaching and that we work on extensively to change habits and outlook.

My stance on this is that there is no such thing as a time problem (because you can't fix time). Instead, we need to see if there is a delegation problem, a prioritization problem, a discipline problem, a skills problem, or something else going on.

Once you set your goals, be sure that you have the time to enjoy working on them. If you don't, then you'll want to delay some of your goals to reduce the time conflict. Otherwise, you'll be back in stress mode.

We want to get out of "spray and pray" mode. Choose one or two goals that are your favorite, the highest payback, or the right opportunity, and charge full-steam ahead on those. Once you have that goal under your belt, you can start working on another.

Get Started

Which area of your life would benefit from you setting some goals?

What goal would you like to set for yourself? Make it detailed, and set a date. If there are others involved that will help you on this goal, create a project plan or task list with due dates, milestones, and deliverables.

It's OK to have small goals too. Write some tiny goals you can easily accomplish below. This could be as simple as trying a new breakfast cereal or watering the plants more

often. Remember, these are tasks you want to do, not ones you think you should do but don't really want to (delegate these!).

□ **Savoring**

Savoring is another immediate mood-changer that can transform your day. Sonja Lyubomirsky writes about it in her book *The How of Happiness*.

Savoring is remembering and cherishing a past, present or future moment to create happiness in the present. It is spending extra time and thought on a positive memory, moment, or anticipation so that the positive feeling is lengthened.

You can savor the past by thinking about one of your treasured life moments – the good old days, if you will. Use all of your five senses to actually go back in time with your mind.

- What did you see, smell, hear, taste, feel? Recall vivid colors, textures, noises, melodies, and voices.
- Was it hot or cold, wet or dry, comfortable or scary, funny or sad?
- What emotions came up?
- What people do you remember?
- What foods were there?

Make the savoring last longer by asking yourself detailed questions about what it was like. You are transporting yourself back to that memory.

You can also savor the past through photographs, scrapbooks, journals, and special occasion albums such as a wedding album, graduation yearbooks, or a journal that tracks the first few years of your children. We have class reunions and family reunions that help us cherish the past and have fun in the present.

Savoring does not have to be limited to the past. It can be used to enjoy the present and anticipate a positive future. Savoring the present is a little different than being in flow. It's intentionally enjoying the present at the same time we're living it. One of the best

ways to implement savoring is through the use of rituals that you create for your family around holidays and special events.

Christmas is a great example with all of its pre-holiday parties during December, Christmas Eve rituals and ceremonies, and the time with family on the day of Christmas. We have a song about the Twelve Days of Christmas and many rituals to the coming of Christmas all through the month of December. When Christmas day finally arrives, we can savor the present Christmas celebration as well as reminisce about past Christmases.

Be careful about savoring the future too much. Sometimes we spend our whole lives looking forward to a future dream that isn't a reality. It's great to be future-oriented, and this trait is especially important for business owners, but you need to be realistic about your future in order to succeed.

A constructive way to implement savoring the future is by planning a nice reward for yourself after you've completed a challenging project. This should be something that you enjoy looking forward to and that is heavenly to you. It can range from a day in bed watching rented movies to a European vacation. Post a symbol or picture in your office so you can remind yourself visually of this reward.

Practice savoring this week by prolonging a current happy moment, calling up a past happy memory, or savoring a future event. List your ideas below:

Laughter

Our stress is helped greatly when we can stop taking ourselves so seriously. When you're laughing, you can't feel anxious, depressed, or sad at the same time. Laughter increases your energy, relieves physical tension, decreases stress hormones, and enables reframing.

Most of us know that laughter is good for us, but we may not make conscious choices to bring it in our business as much as possible. You also may not know that there is an entire field of study called therapeutic humor. There is even an association for comedians who work in hospitals and businesses to relieve stress. It's called AATH, the

Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor. Therapeutic humor can support learning, improve health, and increase performance at work.

Here are some ideas to bring humor and laughter into your business:

1. Bring a funny movie to work, and show it in the training room during lunch, giving everyone a 2-hour lunch that day as a treat.
2. Start a recess at work where you have 15 minutes to do something that makes you laugh. You can bring your hula hoop or yo-yo or whatever object gives you a giggle.
3. During the 3:00 afternoon blahs, pipe rock music over the sound system or simply turn up your iPod and dance or conga your way around the office.
4. Watch Dilbert or The Office for some laughs and to be grateful your workplace doesn't look like theirs.
5. Bring toys to work and have a toy chest where employees can grab one when they want to. Fill it with slinkys, Rubik's cube (I don't know about you, but this one increases my stress!), Play-Doh®, Crayons®, stress balls, and water guns, if you dare.
6. Post funny pictures and signs around the office so employees can pause for a laugh.
7. Have everyone choose a character for a day, and stay in that character all day long. The others have to guess who you are.
8. Post a whiteboard in the break room where everyone writes a funny comment or joke for others to read.
9. Organize your employees into teams and play a game for points to encourage team-building, bonding, and friendly competition. Your Generation Ys (thirty-somethings) will love to do all the work around this for you.
10. Hire a comedian, psychic, or magician to speak to your team and lighten the mood.

List some ways you can add a healthy dose of laughter to your workplace. If you work at home, you can do many of the same things, but you have to give yourself permission to stop and take the break you need. If you'd rather not do them alone, find a partner or two that you can call at a pre-appointed time and virtually connect with using Skype, Zoom, or Slack and your webcam.

□ Nature

When our grandmothers told us to get out in the fresh air, they instinctively knew nature was good for our bodies, and now science has caught up with them. Here are a few of the research findings about how nature can reduce stress:

1. A natural setting may ameliorate the effects of stress on the body.^{19,20} One study tested individuals who had just experienced a stressor at work. They were shown pictures of natural settings and experienced a decrease in blood pressure, muscle tension, and heart rate. This implies that nature can help us recover faster from a stressful event.²¹
2. Certain kinds of contact with the outside world, including animals, plants, landscape, and the wilderness, may promote health.²²
3. When access to gardens is not available, depression and anxiety increase.²³
4. Nature restores our ability to concentrate, according to a theory by Kaplan called Attention Restoration Theory.²⁴ When you are overwhelmed, your attention may be fatigued and you may be unable to learn any new information, adding to your stress.

Getting out into nature allows the mind to rest. The natural scene of birds moving in the trees, the wind blowing plants, and the clouds dotting the sky allow the mind to absorb these inputs while giving the thinking part of the brain a needed rest.

Horticulture Therapy

There's a whole new field that studies the healing impact of nature. It's called horticulture therapy, and it focuses on the use of gardens and nature in hospitals for healing. Luckily, architects are catching on too, and very recently, newly designed hospitals, sanitariums, and retirement homes have incorporated gardens into their architecture.²⁵ The characteristics of a healing garden include simplicity and order to counteract the chaotic insides of a hospital.²⁶

Feeling Green

You can enjoy nature most if you work at home and in a climate that is comfortable. When possible, spend some time outside surrounded by plants and flowers or with a view of a landscape. If you live in an apartment, spend time at the pool or on your patio. If you have no greenery outside your house, you can visit your local park. You may be able to do some of the same if you work in an office. When it's not possible to be outside, spend time near a window with a view to the outdoors and green plants or near an indoor plant.

When I still lived in Dallas, I used to take a long break from 2:00 to roughly 4:00 PM every day that I could. I took a long walk in the neighborhood, or I worked out if the weather was too cold or hot. But you don't have to stop working to enjoy the outside. If you're on a wireless system, take your laptop outside for an hour, and return email or get that article finished while the sun warms your skin.

If your office is nature-challenged, place some houseplants or flowers on your desk or somewhere in your office so that you are always in sight of some green.

There's no reason why you couldn't use horticulture therapy in your own office or home to boost your immune system response. If your life is especially chaotic, take a cue from this field and design the green in your life to be simple and orderly.

What will you implement in your business to reduce your stress with nature?

Music

Music is the most common stress management approach people use, according to a survey performed by the American Psychological Association. So it's quite likely that you're already listening to music as a stress-reliever, and science agrees that there are benefits. Some experts say it's the rhythm of the music that has the calming effect on our bodies.

Calming music can help you lower anxiety and stress. Music relaxes muscles, changes heart rate, and can produce endorphins, a chemical that makes us feel happy.

Music can either calm you or stimulate you, so it's important to be intentional about the type of music you play if you want to reduce your stress. Choose music that you like and that calms you for your best effect.

If you have an iPod, load some songs into a section called stress relief, and have them ready to play when you need them. What will you implement in your business to reduce your stress with music?

□ Faith

A person's faith in a higher power can help them reduce stress, increase their positive emotions, and become slightly more satisfied with their life.²⁷ This effect increases with people who are certain about their beliefs, have a strong relationship with the divine, pray, and participate in church.²⁸

For many, faith provides meaning and purpose in people's lives. A U.S. Gallup Organization survey showed that people who felt that their religious faith was the most important thing in their life were twice as likely to report that they were very happy than those lowest in spiritual commitment.²⁹

Studying faith in a scientific context is quite difficult because many of the studies measuring prayer and healing have been very poorly designed, and research often shows mixed, conflicting, and inconclusive results. This is unfortunate, but since faith is such a personal topic, the decision to use it in your stress-reduction program should be a very individual one.

About one-third of people who suffer from stress said that praying helped them relieve stress. If this is right for you, then ask yourself what you will implement in your business to reduce your stress with faith or prayer. Make some notes below, and incorporate this into your action items.

□ Twelve Positivity Tools

Here's the list of tools that we covered in this chapter:

- Reframing
- Gratitude
- Acts of kindness
- Expressions of positive emotions
- Focusing on your strengths

- Flow
- Goals and connecting with purpose
- Savoring
- Laughter
- Nature
- Music
- Faith

Now, you have twelve new positivity tools that can help you reduce your stress. In the next chapter, we'll use what we learned to de-stress your schedule, bringing these tools into your daily routine to calm and smooth your day.

Chapter Two: De-Stressing Your Schedule

What percentage of your time do you spend doing positive, stress-free activities, being in a positive environment, or socializing with positive people versus negative activities, environment, and people? Most people don't think about their schedule in such an intentional way, but I believe some amazing transformations can take place when we examine the details of our daily lives and become discriminating at what we choose to experience.

When you commit to reducing your stress, you can correspondingly benefit by being more intentional about how you spend your day. Just by reviewing your daily activities at a detailed level, you can see clearly where you can add some more fun, some more positivity, and reduce your stress. We'll walk you through the whole process, which is deceptively simple. It will be up to you to do the part that matters most: implementing your new ideas.

In this chapter, we'll focus on helping you de-stress your daily activities as much as possible. In Chapter Three, we'll discuss how you can de-stress your environment, and in Chapter Four, we'll concentrate on helping you surround yourself with stress-free friends and family.

□ Breaking Down Your Typical Day

During your typical day, you no doubt have parts of the day you like better than others. Using all of the positivity tools you learned in Chapter One, let's see how we can improve the less desirable parts of your day. When we can boost the low parts of your day, your overall level of positive emotions will go up and your stress level will go down.

The first step is to write down the major activities you do as part of your normal weekday. Here's an example of Jane's day:

Morning

- ___ Get up. Watch Today show. ___
- ___ Diet Coke for breakfast ___
- ___ Get kids to school ___
- ___ Drive to work – 40-minute commute in heavy traffic (hate this part) ___
- ___ Check email. ___
- ___ Work on project with tightest deadline ___
- ___ Worry about who I am going to lunch with ___
- ___ End up eating at my desk ___

Afternoon

- __ Meetings all afternoon __
- __ Raid vending machines __
- __ Return phone calls __
- __ Commute home in heavy traffic __
- __ Pick up kids form day care __

Evenings

- __ Help kids with homework __
- __ Fix dinner for kids __
- __ Do a load of laundry __
- __ Play with kids __
- __ Check email __
- __ Spend an hour on Facebook __
- __ Sleep __

Now it's your turn. Fill out the left side with the activities that make up your typical work day. Keep the right side blank; we'll fill it in later.

Morning

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Afternoon

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Evening

Find a red and green highlighter. Highlight the activities you like the best about your day in green, and highlight your least favorite activities in red. Jane has highlighted just about all of her activities in red, so let's see how we can improve her day and possibly yours.

Starting Your Day

Jane's first activity is "*Get up. Watch Today show.*" In the first few minutes of the day, our minds are the most sensitive and impressionable. When you watch TV, you don't have control over whether a murder news story is aired or a Calvin Klein commercial that may make us feel inadequate and homely if we're not wearing their jeans or perfume. Neither is the best way to initiate your day. Here are five new ideas for Jane to get her positive juices flowing first thing in the morning.

First, just take a few minutes for yourself. Relax, close your eyes, and breathe.

1. Before your feet hit the floor in the morning, think of **three things you are grateful for**. It could be something as small as a vision of a butterfly out your window or as big as being grateful for your amazing family. Don't get up until you have thought of three! Studies show practicing gratitude is one of the more consistent ways to improve your happiness.
2. Instead of TV, pop in your favorite CD and get the juices flowing. Listen to the **music** mindfully, and enjoy its rhythms.
3. Set an **intention** for the day. Do you have a question for the universe? A problem you're working on at work? A goal you want to achieve? Or even just a theme for the day that you could share as a game with the kids? Set a statement, question, or keyword for the day. As you move through the day, look for things that support your intention. Listen to what your intuition is showing you. Have fun with your theme.
4. Think of someone you love. Make a point to call or meet with them during the day to tell them how much you care about them. **Telling someone you love them**

will make their day as well as yours. Do this for someone different every day. In our problem-based world, we often forget to be proactive about our feelings.

5. **Meditate.** Meditation is catching on big-time. Take 15-30 minutes first thing in the morning to calm and sharpen your mind and receive the benefits of this practice. (Read more about this in Chapter Seven.)

Which one will Jane try? She might try out each one for a week, then settle on her favorite, occasionally rotating ideas so they don't get boring. Jane should build whatever personal ritual she wants around her practice. For example, with setting an intention, she might want to write it out, put it in a special bowl, and reflect on it when she gets home or before bedtime.

On the right side of your activity list, write down any ideas you have to improve how you start your day and put them on your calendar. Return to Chapter One, and flip through each of the 12 tools we described. Compare these to each of the activities you listed to get ideas to reduce your stress. You'll uncover dozens of ideas you can add to your activities list to try, just like we did with the five listed above to start Jane's day better.

□ Common Stressors and Examples

Let's take a look at how we can transform some activities that most people must endure during their routine day.

Traffic

A lot of people are bugged by their morning commute. There are many ways you can improve it:

1. Pop in your favorite CD, and enjoy the music during your commute.
2. If you are listening to talk radio with a DJ that is argumentative or complains a lot, reconsider a more peaceful sound for your commute.
3. Change to a car that is more fun to drive.
4. Try different routes.
5. Delegate by trying public transportation.
6. If possible, change your work times to avoid the brunt of the traffic volume.
7. Reframe. Ric Newell, a defensive driving expert, says to assume that the car that just cut you off has a dog in the front seat that is bleeding to death and the owner is rushing to the nearest vet to try to save its life. Most of the time, we just assume that the other driver is a lousy, thoughtless driver, but we really never know what their story or circumstances are. Perhaps we would drive the exact same way if we were in their position.

8. Become mindful. Get really involved in your driving. Watch other drivers, anticipate their needs and go with the flow. When I am tuned in, I can tell when other drivers are going to change lanes before they do it, and I make a game of anticipating what they want to do.
9. Notice your surroundings in a more intentional way: other vehicles, traffic signs, businesses, street markings, landscaping.

If this list gives you some ideas, make a note of them on your sheet to the right of any activities you'd like to improve.

Advertising

Consumerism is a big part of our society. Take a guess as to how many commercial advertisements you are exposed to on a weekly basis. The number of ads that an average shopper in the U.S. sees in one week is 1,000.³⁰ One thousand ads are pounding at you, telling you that you need to be thinner, sexier, more beautiful, more handsome, more tanned, richer, taller, more popular, more chic, more famous, smarter, more macho, stronger, have silkier hair, washboard abs, a clear complexion, more hair, a fancier car, work fewer hours, play on the beach, jet across the world, and travel to faraway places, or you are worthless.

When we get these messages all day long, every day, it invades our psyche and lowers our self-esteem. It's subconscious; it goes straight into our subconscious whether we consciously agree with the messages or not.

Some people, without knowing why, become greedy, jealous, envious, and over-materialistic. In young children, the space once filled by family, community, and religion is now filled by consumerism and consumption, according to Stephanie Kaza.³¹ If you feel impacted by this, consider excluding television, cable, or websites with heavy advertising from your schedule for a week and see if there is a difference in your thoughts or behaviors. If there is, you might want to consider curtailing the time you spend consuming content with ads so you don't have to be subjected to the constant commercial messages.

Violence

A typical American child watches 100,000 acts of violence and 8,000 murders on TV in her lifetime.³² These acts of fear and hatred permeate our subconscious and become part of our brain in the form of conscious and subconscious memories. If you feel angry for no good reason, consider curtailing activities that expose you to violence, such as the news, TV, cable, subscriptions, movies, and video games. If your anger subsides, you'll know that it's time to replace the media with more peaceful content.

Examples

Carolyn's husband used to listen to talk radio, the kind that argues about politics and religion all day. A few weeks after he quit, Carolyn noticed a kinder, gentler husband. He wasn't as argumentative as he was before.

Michelle felt stressed by the amount of work she had to do each day. She felt that she was doing nothing but answering email all day long. She decided to dedicate her first two hours in the morning to her highest priority task, without checking her email for the first two hours. She also turned off her email app's automatic send-and-receive function so she could control when she received email. She got an amazing amount done and felt a lot less pressure by simply turning off her email interruptions and switching the order of two tasks during her day.

Katy used to get home late every night, until she delegated the supervision of some of her staff to a job foreman. She now has an employee with new skills whom she can count on. She learned to let go of control, and now she's home early.

Serena is a naturally happy person and just needed a few small boosts to her day. She added classical music to her morning with great results. When she got into work, she felt rejuvenated and fresh.

If these examples give you some ideas, make a note of them on your sheet to the right of any activities you'd like to improve.

□ **Implementing Your Ideas**

Analyze each of your activities (and especially the ones highlighted in red) by asking the following question:

How can I change my activities to be more desirable and positive?

As each activity transforms from red to green, you will be raising the low point of your day to be higher and higher. In this way, you'll become more and more stress-free.

Keep working on your day until you've transformed your activities to all green. This may require some creativity on your part, but this is a great question to keep asking yourself to continue to raise the bar on your life!

Make notes on the right column of all the ideas you have about changing your day.

Get Organized

If you have a lot of ideas about what new activities you can bring into your routine, that's great. Now we need to put them into practice.

I suggest you implement each idea, one at a time. What idea do you like best that you can implement tomorrow? **Write this one on your calendar, and make a commitment to do it.** Prioritize each of your ideas, and add them to your to do list or your calendar. Give yourself a day or two in between each idea so you don't get overwhelmed.

To remind yourself to get started, do whatever it takes. Write and post sticky notes, set an alarm, or tie a string around your finger so you'll remember to change habits and start something new.

Quantum Leap

You've successfully transformed your typical day. Now expand the exercise by keeping a log for the entire week. Include both business and personal activities, and go into the weekend. Go through the same exercise, reviewing each positivity tool from Chapter One, to see how you can transform your activities to stress-free.

We'll return to your activities list after Chapters Five, Six, and Seven; we'll be adding even more cool stress-busting ideas, so don't despair if you still have a few "red" activities left.

For now, let's move on to de-stressing your environment, one piece of clutter at a time!

Chapter Three: De-Stressing Your Environment

Sometimes we don't even notice what's going on around us.

A study was conducted on a college campus walkway where a researcher stopped and asked a person for directions to a nearby campus building. During the time the participant was in the middle of giving directions to the researcher, a construction worker carrying a door who was in on the experiment sandwiched her way in between the researcher and participant, temporarily separating them.

Unbeknownst to the subject participant, a second researcher was hiding behind the door. The second researcher, who looked and dressed differently, took the place of the first researcher while the door was passing by. The study question was whether the subjects giving directions would notice that they were giving directions to a whole different person after the door interruption.

Did they notice?

Only 50 percent did.

The bigger surprise was how many did NOT notice that they were giving directions to an entirely different person than they started out with. When the researcher was "like" the participant, such as a fellow student, they noticed the difference more. When there was an age difference or the researcher was perceived as not being part of the person's social group, the rate of notice plummeted to 35 percent.

This chapter is about paying attention to our surroundings and taking a look at whether they add negatives or positives to our lives. Does your environment support you or suck energy from you? In this section, let's focus on transforming our environment to support and nurture us.

This is simply a guide for helping you look at your life more intentionally. When you can take a look at how to improve the things around you, your subconscious will be well-fed and nurtured. You'll feel better even though you might not consciously know why!

Breaking Down Your Typical Day: Surroundings

Think about the places where you spend the largest part of your day. For most people, these are going to be your house, your car, and your office. If you listed your house, let's break it down further. Outside of sleeping, what room do you spend the most time in?

The first step is to write down a description of each of these places that you spend the most time in. Everyone should list their bedroom or where they sleep.

Here is Jane's list:

Office

- Nice desk and chair
- Often too cold
- Lots of stacks of paper everywhere
- Nice phone, don't know how to work all the knobs
- Empty walls
- Clean white paint
- Green carpet

Bedroom

- Bed is old and sagging
- Sheets are scratchy sometimes
- Clutter on nightstand
- Cat bed and boxes in one corner
- Window has nice view
- Cool painting of sunset on wall
- White walls
- Beige carpet

Car

- Windshield has crack
- Inside of car smells like McDonald's
- Nice CD player

Living Room

- Ficus plant looks a little sick, losing its leaves
- Old curtains
- Comfortable white fabric couch
- Nice lamp
- White walls
- Built-in shelves, holds romance novels and self-help guides
- Wood floors

Stress Relievers: Surroundings

Now it's your turn. Choose at least three places (down to the room) where you spend most of your day. Include your office and bedroom. Fill out the left side with a brief description of your surroundings. Keep the right side blank; we'll fill it in later.

Office

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Bedroom

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Place 3: _____

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Place 4: _____

Grab your red and green highlighter. Highlight the surroundings that support you in green, and highlight your challenge areas in red. Jane has highlighted just about all of her surroundings in red, so let's see how we can improve her environment and possibly yours.

Jane's Car

We could start just about anywhere; Jane needs lots of changes. Let's start with her car. Jane's car windshield has a crack. That's not only ugly; it's also dangerous and probably covered by insurance, so Jane should take action and get someone to fix her windshield, pronto.

Energy Saps

Staring at the crack in the windshield every day saps Jane's energy whether she is consciously aware of it or not. Every time we look at a stack of papers, dirty dishes, unironed laundry, a piece of workout equipment we haven't used in a while, unopened mail, or the like, a little piece of our energy drains out of us and into the task we have delayed. This is especially true with women. We need to plug these energy leaks so we can get our strength back and live more powerfully and in harmony with our environment.

Replace the Negative with the Positive

Here are five new ideas for Jane to try to get her positive juices flowing in her car.

1. Take pride in the assets you own. Keep them **in good repair and clean**. Consider detailing your car (either yourself or hire someone). It's kind of fun to get the hose out on the weekend and wash your car the old-fashioned way. You'll feel better driving a clean car. Remove any clutter, and add a couple of fun items that will make it homey and practical like a pillow, cool sunglasses, and a fun umbrella.
2. Take advantage of the nice CD player, and rock to the music you like from your CD collection. Listen to the **music** mindfully, and enjoy its rhythms.
3. Pick up a friend and give them a lift somewhere. **Doing things with friends** increases your happiness.
4. **Practice acts of kindness** on the roadway. Let people go first at the stop sign or merge into your lane easily. They will appreciate it, and you'll feel better doing it.
5. **Take a gratitude drive**. Be grateful for the car you have, the roads you take, the views along the way, and anything else you notice during your drive.

Which one will Jane try? She might try out each one for a week, then settle on her favorite, occasionally rotating ideas so they don't get boring. Jane should build whatever personal ritual she wants around her practice.

□ Examples

Stephanie shared her desk with her associate, who kept a messy desk. It was bothering Stephanie, but she didn't realize how much. Immediately, she fixed the problem by finding a new desk for her associate and taking back her desk.

Diane got tremendous inspiration from the giants and visionaries in her field. She decided to frame and hang portraits of these famous people that she admired most on her office walls. This inspired her to work at a higher level, now surrounded by the geniuses in her field. What can you do to your environment to raise your thinking up a notch?

Some more ideas for the office:

1. Fill your walls with a vision board, diplomas reminding you of past goals accomplished that you can savor, people you admire, and beautiful nature scenes.

2. Add plants, and if you're into feng shui, buy yourself a healthy jade plant and put it in your money corner. I can't vouch for the science of feng shui is but I know the jade will reduce your stress.
3. File any papers away in closets or cabinets so your office feels organized and productive.
4. Have photos of your loved ones on your desk.
5. Post or display awards you've earned in the past to boost your mood through savoring.
6. Hire a heating and air conditioning repair person to adjust the temperature of your office if it's not ideal. You can't type well if your fingers are freezing.
7. Bring in a decorator to spruce up curtains, furniture, carpet or walls if needed.
8. Add some fresh flowers periodically.
9. Play music while you are working.
10. Post sticky notes on your desk about the ideas in this chapter that you like so that you will be sure to implement them.

If you work from home and don't have a dedicated office space, get one. You can't run a serious business without having a space. Initially, your office space doesn't have to be a complete room, but it does need to be a permanent space that only contains business items and is not shared with anyone else living in your home. I personally started in my dining room (who uses their dining room, anyway?) with a folding table, a computer, and a 4-drawer filing cabinet. I ran my office there for five years before I finally moved into an extra bedroom. (Today we have workout equipment in our "dining room;" my spouse loves his free weights, and I love my treadmill.)

Organize Your Ideas

Use the following question to analyze each of your activities (and especially the ones highlighted in red) for improvement.

How can I change my environment to make it richer and to support my needs better?

On the right side of your surroundings list, write down any ideas you have to improve your environment. Refer back to Chapter One to get some more ideas about how to transform your environment into a positive place that supports and nurtures you.

If you have a lot of ideas about what new items you can bring into your surroundings, that's great. Now we need to put them into practice.

I suggest you implement each idea, one at a time. What idea do you like best that you can implement tomorrow? **Write this one on your calendar, and make a commitment to do it.** Prioritize each of your ideas, and add them to your to do list or your calendar. Give yourself a day or two in between each idea so you don't get overwhelmed.

Chapter Four: De-Stressing Your Relationships

The people around us in our business and life greatly affect our stress level for better or worse, mostly for the better according to science. It just makes sense to discuss this in detail so you can benefit from an increased awareness of your relationships and what they mean to you.

□ The Benefits of Friendships

First let's answer why friendship is important to reducing your stress.

1. Having social relationships is correlated with better immunosurveillance, lower stress hormone levels, and better levels of autonomic activity.³³
2. People with close relationships cope better with stress. People who prefer a higher income and job success to close friendships were twice as likely to report their happiness level as “fairly” or “very unhappy.”³⁴
3. Friendship is one of the highest correlates with happiness.³⁵ People are happier around friends.^{36,37} People who can name several intimate friends are happier, less likely to die prematurely, and healthier.³⁸ Happy people are more active, energetic, social, engage in more activities, enjoy social interactions, and have a strong support network.³⁹
4. Each relationship plays a different role in our happiness. Marriage is the closest relationship, has the strongest effects, and can also be a source of conflict. Friends are a source of companionship for activities and contribute to positive moods. Co-workers help with work problems and companionship at work. Family can provide major help in crises when needed. Neighbors provide help with small tasks. Family and neighbors are more important for working-class people.⁴⁰
5. Social relationships are necessary for happiness, but they need to be predominately positive.⁴¹

The research is clear and very strong. Relationships matter, and close, positive relationships are like gold.

Are Your Friends Increasing or Decreasing Your Stress?

Friends can be a source of extreme joy and can also be a source of conflict and suffering. The task for this chapter is to take a look at your friendships. Which ones are supporting you? Which ones provide constant challenges?

When you make a commitment to your own stress-free lifestyle, it's a great habit to acknowledge the positive, supportive people around you. Through our many positivity boosters: gratitude, laughter, acts of kindness, positive emotions, savoring, reframing, and using our strengths, we can let the people in our lives know how much we love and care about them.

Correspondingly, sometimes we have to make tough choices about the people around us who are addicted to suffering, drama, stress, and mostly negative emotions. We may need to let them go.

Let's do an exercise to see how stress-free the relationships are in our lives.

□ **Social Circles**

This exercise is designed to bring you a higher awareness of who you have in your life to help you reduce your stress.

Take out a blank sheet of paper, and draw a small circle in the middle. Write your name in the circle. This represents you.

Draw a little larger circle next to your circle. Write your business team: employees and contractors in this circle. Draw a small circle for your five largest clients, and write their names in the circles. Draw one more circle for your business mentors and coaches, and write their names inside the circle. This represents your business.

Draw another circle in another area of your paper to represent your family. Write in your immediate family members, however you define it for you. This could be a spouse and kids as in the traditional sense or it could be something completely different like a group of very close friends. It could also be an extended family such as in-laws, parents, cousins, and siblings. Add some more circles near your family circle and write your close friends' names in.

Now, think about what groups you belong to. It could be your church, a professional association, a social club, and/or a sports club or team. Make large circles for each of the groups you feel connected to, and write some of the key names you know that are part of each of the groups.

Add a few more circles in the same way if you have extended family, more acquaintances to list, or other groups that you didn't add above. The sheet should now represent all of the important people in your life that support you in one way or another.

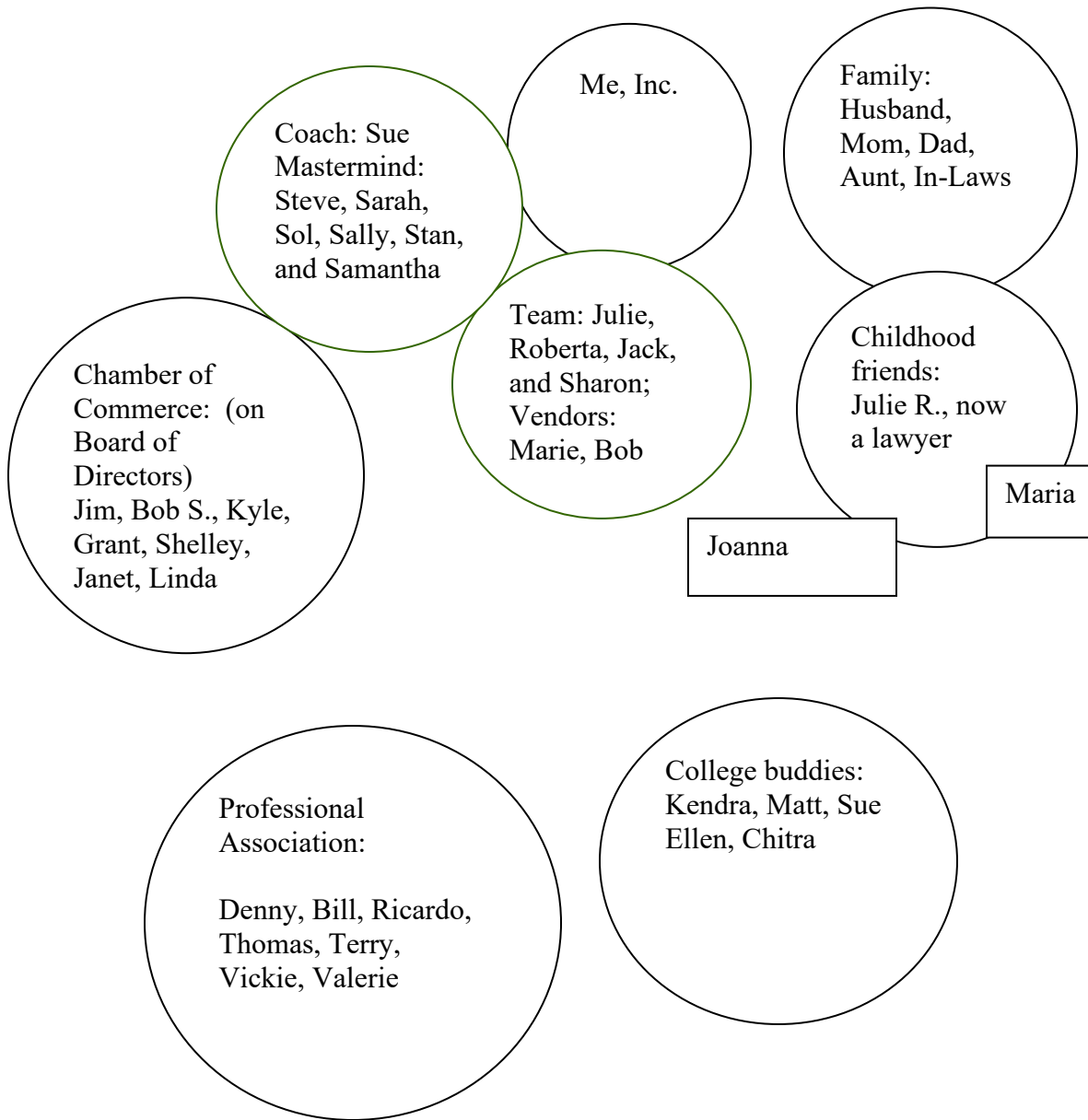
Now is where the ah-ha's come in:

1. Find a green and red highlighter (or write in a + or – sign next to the name). Highlight in green the people who you love spending the most time with and who are highly positive and stress-free. Highlight in red the people you dread spending time with and who are mostly negative and cause increased stress.
2. Find a purple highlighter (or write a heart shape next to the name). Highlight in purple the business mentors, coaches, trainers, and vendors who are providing you with great advice you in your business. There will likely only be one or two special ones you'll want to mark.
3. Find a yellow highlighter (or write a happy face next to the name). Highlight in yellow all of the people whom you can delegate work to. This could be a VA (Virtual Assistant), all your team members and vendors, and a personal assistant. If you want, you can also list your personal support team since this is important in reducing stress. Most people have a much larger team than they realize by the time they write down the nanny, cook, gardener, esthetician, wardrobe consultant, makeup artist, nail artist, hair stylist, nutritionist, personal workout trainer, butler, chauffeur, masseuse, travel agent, and water boy. Okay, I'm getting carried away, here!
4. Find a blue highlighter (or write in a tennis ball next to the name). Highlight in blue all of the friends you can escape work with while simply hanging out (and not talking about work), playing sports, shopping, watching a movie, doing a spa day, or taking a vacation with. These are the people that can help you reduce your stress.

We'll stop here, but you can continue selecting colors and shapes to select people in your circles who reduce your stress in ways we didn't list.

Find an example on the next page:

Green = positive people
Red = negative people
Purple = coaches, mentors
Yellow = team, vendors
Blue = Escape pals



When you take a look at your social circles, what do you notice?

1. Do you have a lot of positive people in your life? Are there some relationships you'd like to deepen?
2. Do you have a lot of negative people in your life? Are there some relationships you need to terminate?
3. Do you have at least 1 business mentor? Women are collaborators, so they really need at least a coach and preferably an entire mastermind group where they can bounce ideas off other business people to get great results.
4. Do you have people in your life you can delegate work to, if you choose?
5. Do you have plenty of friends you can get away from work with?
6. What else do you notice about how your network can help you become stress-free? Are there gaps? Do you feel strongly supported?

If you find that you would like to have some more friends (or coaches, team members, or “play pals”) or deepen relationships with those you have, please set that intention for yourself and start the conversation. The objective is to allow yourself to feel supported and to get the support you need in all areas of your life.

Make a list of action items you can do to strengthen your network. Where can you look for new friends? Could you join a group or get more involved in the groups you are already part of? Could you contact some old friends and rekindle past relationships?

When you can increase the support of family and friendships you have in your life, your stress will go way down. Make a note of what you'd like to change related to the relationships you now have in your life.

Chapter Five: De-Stress Your Thoughts

Resilience is a whole new area of study that teaches people to cope better through a crisis. Research has found that these tools and thinking pattern changes can be used on a routine basis to reduce your stress.

Scientists used to think that some people were genetically wired to cope better than others. But now they know that these coping tools can be taught. Everyone can learn to become more resilient, and when they do, they will also significantly reduce their stress.

What's most interesting is that no one lists these ideas in a typical stress reduction plan. Yet, when you can change your thoughts to be more positive and less stressful, your whole world will change from black and white to color.

The key to resilience is to better leverage the strengths of both the emotional side of your brain and the logical side of your brain for better decision-making and action-taking. Too often, we let our emotional thoughts win, which get us stuck in life, or worse, have us doing self-sabotaging activities. Instead, if we learn to apply the logical side of our brain to some of our emotionally inaccurate thinking, we are in a much better position for success.

Here are some of my favorite resilience tips and tools that you can use to de-stress your thoughts:

1. "Blow Off Steam" List
2. Making Friends with Your Inner Critic
3. Thinking Traps to Avoid
 - a. Jumping to Conclusions
 - b. Catastrophic Thinking
 - c. Mind Reading
 - d. Assigning Responsibility
 - e. Negative Filtering
4. Understanding Your Explanatory Style
5. Being Right or Related

□ "Blow Off Steam" List

Sometimes you just need a relief valve, so I want to start with a tool I created especially for my fast-track VIP coaching clients. Even the best of us have our moments where we'd just prefer to scream at the top of our lungs, and these come up more and more frequently as you push and expand your own growth boundaries. Instead of screaming,

which most of us won't do because it's so socially inappropriate, I developed the "blow off steam" list. You won't find this one in any research journal!

Write your 10 favorite quickie activities that you can do when things reach a boiling point (fight or flight) and you need to escape (flight). Here's a possible list that you can build on and customize for yourself:

- a. Shut your office door, play rock music, and dance for three minutes. (Seriously!)
- b. Go outside and walk around the block.
- c. Take three deep breaths and let go of everything.
- d. Call your kids and tell them you love them.
- e. Play ball with your dog or show your cat a feather she can pounce on.
- f. Do a visualization that takes you to a beach, mountain, or a bubble bath.
- g. Climb up a couple of flights of stairs, lift some weights, or do a few squats or pushups. Please stretch first so you don't get an injury, and you can stop right before you start sweating if you want to.
- h. Meditate for five minutes.
- i. Belt out your favorite song if you're a singer, or even if you aren't.
- j. Water your plant and prune its leaves, or stare out the window at a nature scene.
- k. Strike a yoga pose.
- l. Lose yourself in classical music. Something dramatic like Mozart's Requiem works for me.
- m. Go into the lunchroom or lobby area and write in long hand three things you are grateful for.
- n. Add your favorite ideas here _____.

Post this list prominently in your office. Then when you hit the boiling point or you just need a break, declare, "Blow off steam time," and choose one from the list. The huge benefit of posting this list is so you don't have to think about what to do when you're in the heat of the moment. The only thing you have to do is to remember to go to your list.

All of these activities should take you three to five minutes to do. The goal is to provide a quick reset or reboot; then you can return to your work refreshed and rejuvenated.

Make Friends with Your Inner Critic

This resilience tip is adapted in part from the Penn Resiliency Program cited in Barbara Fredrickson's *Positivity*. We all have that inner negative voice that talks to us and tries to keep us from doing anything risky (or sometimes from doing anything at all). The key is to make friends with that part of you.

Here are some thoughts you might be familiar with:

- I really messed up parking this time.
- My customer's not happy. I'm not good enough to be self-employed.
- They laid off Paul. Will I be next?
- I'm too slow. I'll never finish.
- I'll never lose this weight.
- Why hasn't he called back?
- I never have enough money for what I want to buy.

What does your inner voice say to you? Write them on an index card as they pop into your mind. Make a whole stack of them if you need to.

There are three schools of thought on how to handle the inner critic. One is to dispute it and argue with it (Penn Resiliency Program). My preference is to create a coaching conversation with your inner critic instead of arguments. Bob Nozick, M.D., and author of *Happy 4 Life* has given his inner critic a fun, jokester personality, which also works beautifully. Here's how to do each method:

Dispute Your Inner Critic

Write down your negative thoughts as they occur. Pick one at a time and read it out loud. Then, very quickly, dispute it. Argue against it. Shoot it down, loudly and with conviction. Some tools to use:

- Tell yourself the facts,
- Put things into perspective,
- Use reframing (from Chapter One),
- Count your blessings (See Gratitude from Chapter One), and
- Remember your strengths (Chapter One).

Go through the entire list until you've disputed all your negative thoughts.

1. Become as fast as possible at disputing your negative thoughts to cut them off before they fully develop.
2. Check your happiness level. Has your frequency of negative emotions reduced?
3. Are you ready to start a project that your inner voice has been squashing?

Personally, I believe that writing and verbalizing your thoughts are useful to move your emotions out of the emotional part of your brain and to begin engaging your left brain or logical brain. But I don't like the arguing which will work fine for males but not females.

Coaching Your Inner Voice

Say your negative thoughts out loud or write them down. Acknowledge them, so your “inner voice” feels heard. Embrace your inner voice, then see if you can add logic to find the truth.

In *The Relationship Cure: A 5-Step Guide for Building Better Connections with Family, Friends, and Lovers*, authors John Gottman and Joan DeClaire define four styles of emotional philosophy that affect communications and how the recipient of the communication reacts to the initiator.

An emotion-dismissing style includes saying things like, “You’ll get over it,” “It’s no big deal,” “Put on your happy face,” and “Grin and bear it.” These phrases cause your inner critic to be suppressed, and this can lead to mental illness.

An emotion-disapproving style is a little stronger. “Don’t be a crybaby,” “Stop whining,” “Change your attitude,” “Snap out of it, now,” and “Your feelings are wrong,” are all phrases that bring up the defensiveness in your inner critic and can rile them to anger. This is what most psychologists recommend to do, and I disagree.

A laissez-faire approach includes phrases like, “You must be sad,” “I can see you’re scared,” and “I understand how you feel.” They include appropriate empathy, but don’t go any further. The inner critic will feel validated, but not soothed.

The emotion-coaching style is the one that Gottman (and I) recommends. It includes phrases such as, “I see how you feel. Let me help you,” “You look scared. You did okay on the last client proposal. Maybe there’s a good reason for the client’s behavior.” and “I see you’re frustrated about your weight. Let’s ask our friend Patty how she lost her baby weight.” Here, you not only empathize with your inner critic’s feelings, but you coach your inner critic (yourself) on how to cope and problem-solve.

Negative thinking is our brain’s bias for survival and likely originates from a perceived lack of control or safety. Once in a while, there may be a warning gem you can glean from your inner critic to help you prevent some future negative consequence. Learn to soothe the destructive portion of your inner critic, and take action on any inner critic thoughts that could be helpful.

Here are some coaching responses you can use with your inner critic:

- I really messed up parking this time.

Gee, I know you like to do a better job, and usually you’re pretty good at getting in the lines. I don’t think this lot is going to fill up, so no harm done. Let’s get our errand run and get home.

- My customer's not happy. I'm not good enough to be self-employed.

Yeah, I can see how he made you feel bad and how you can feel like that right now. Would it help to remember all the great clients you're making really happy right now?

- They laid off Paul. Will I be next?

Wow, layoffs are really scary. You never know what's going to happen next at the office. Do you feel like discussing it with your boss?

- I'm too slow. I'll never finish.

It can feel bad to miss a deadline. Would you feel better if we created a whole new schedule, reworked some priorities, and set some realistic expectations?

- I'll never lose this weight.

It feels awful to be out of control with our bodies. Maybe we haven't found the right solution yet. Nutrition has gotten so much more complicated than when we were kids. How about if we ask our friends who have lost weight what worked for them?

- Why hasn't he called back?

I can see how you might feel anxious. You had a really good time on the date, and you'd like to see him again. Why don't we call him on Thursday if he hasn't called yet, so we can put it out of our mind until then?

- I never have enough money for what I want to buy.

Wow, you really want that! Let's see, that would come out to working an extra 12 hours. Hmm, that's six nights away from the kids, so maybe we don't need it that bad. I really love spending time with the kids.

Eventually, using this method, your inner critic will become quieter and quieter and your true intuition will amplify. Plus, you'll get better and better at solving your own problems.

New Personality for Your Inner Creature

A third approach to taming your inner critic is to think of your inner critic as a separate person from you, give it a name, and create a personality. Then, when it needs to express itself, let it know you heard it and say something like, "You're joking, That's not true." Have fun turning your inner critic into a playful creature that's just a little misguided. Eventually, it will simmer down as your intuition becomes stronger.

The most important thing to remember with your inner critic is that it's actually a fearful part of you. It does not deserve to be ridiculed, ignored, or become angry at. If you do, it just gets bigger. A basic law of physics is that resistance creates more friction, and it holds true here, too.

Your inner critic is a part of you, after all. Treat it as you would your best friend when they're scared, and it will no longer get in your way. The key steps for this are:

1. Become aware of what your inner critic is saying.
2. Develop a coaching dialog as if it were your fearful friend.
3. Move from negative emotion to positive emotion by adding empathy and some logical problem-solving to dissolve the fear.

□ Thinking Patterns

Since our brain exaggerates negative emotions, we all have a tendency to exaggerate our negative thinking when certain pieces of information are missing. Here are some patterns to watch out for and some ideas on how to correct these negative thinking patterns.

Jumping to Conclusions

Have you ever received a phone call or email that simply says, "Call me as soon as possible?"

This type of situation can move your brain right into a thinking trap called "jumping to conclusions" covered in the book *The Resilience Factor* and originally discovered by Aaron Beck, the father of cognitive based therapy. How often do you jump to conclusions throughout your week? When you get the call that leaves information out, you might think the worst, then your adrenals go into overdrive as you worry, panic, and become distressed.

What happens to your thinking? If it's a customer, which thought do you naturally think:

1. There's a problem with the work I did,
2. Something is wrong,
3. They're not going to pay my bill,
4. They're going to give me more work,
5. They're calling to tell me how happy they are with my work,
6. Nothing. They just want me to call them and I'm not going to speculate why.

It's more likely you are thinking #1, #2, or #3. This type of thinking leads to increased stress. It doesn't have to be this way. This thinking is inaccurate and blown out of proportion most of the time. It's a belief that you have that you will want to transform.

Our brain is designed to fill in information, to make assumptions, and to use shortcuts so it doesn't have to think very hard. It's very natural to think the worst when we don't have all of the information in which to make an accurate evaluation.

If you're overly optimistic, you might think #4 or #5. The healthiest answer is to train your brain to think #6. Don't let your brain waste resources trying to fill in a story that is unlikely to be accurate.

To retrain your brain, the first step is to notice when it happens and to see if it happens around certain people, at work, or during certain times. The second step is to relax as much as possible and respond to the person who wants you to call them as soon as possible. That way, the ambiguity is shortened and the brain will not have time to ruminate about any assumptions it is making.

Catastrophic Thinking

The sister to jumping to conclusions is catastrophic thinking. This is when your thoughts form a cascade of events that lead you to a worst-case scenario. Let's say you just made a proposal to a prospect that turned you down. Your thinking is now that you're going to starve as an entrepreneur. Here's how it cascades:

"I lost the sale."

"I can't attract clients."

"I'll never get another client again."

"I'll have to get a job at Starbucks."

"They won't hire me because I'm overqualified."

"I'm going to run out of money."

"I won't have enough money for groceries."

"I'm going to starve."

Because you lose one sale, your mind can have you quickly thinking that it's quite likely you're going to starve. See how each thought leads to the next until your mind has you out on the street with a homeless sign that says, "Hungry"? It's easy and natural for the brain to do this, because it is our default wiring to be survival-focused.

Let's start over with each thought, adding reason and rationality, so we can retrain our brains.

"I lost the sale" is a fact. "I can't attract clients" is a generalization from the previous fact that moves from one client to multiple clients. It's not true, and even if it is, a simple

change in marketing materials could fix the problem. “I’ll never get another client again” is now highly unlikely, now that you know that the fact only pertains to one client and a single timeframe instead of forever. You probably won’t have to get a job at Starbucks, and instead your time is better spent doing some more marketing and selling.

A red flag should go up in your brain whenever you think or hear words like “never,” “always,” and “forever.” This is classic catastrophizing:

“I’m always going to be fat.”

“I’m never going to be rich.”

“I’m never going to find a wife.”

The key tip is to ask yourself what the truth is in the moment. Then you can understand that your lost sale only applies to the one situation and not to situations in the future. Here’s a better line of thinking:

“I lost the sale.”

“I can make more calls tomorrow that will lead to a new sale.”

“Sales is a numbers game, and when I increase my numbers, I increase sales.”

“Maybe I can call to find out why they didn’t want to buy and apply the constructive criticism I get to improve my sales presentation or my services.”

“I can go to more networking meetings to meet more people.”

When you stay out of catastrophic thinking, you are more likely to think of excellent ways to improve your business results through your open, relaxed, creative mind.

Mind Reading

Have you ever made an assumption about what another person is thinking? Worse, have you ever made a *wrong* assumption about what another person is thinking?

Here’s an example. Mike is your client. You hand him a report that you worked on with all your spirit. He takes a 10-second glance at it, grunts, and leaves. You’re crushed. Mike must be really unhappy with your work. You go back to your office and sulk. You’re pretty sure you’re going to be fired any minute now.

What you did above is to read Mike’s mind and assume he hated the report. Maybe Mike was trying to leave work to pick up his sick kid, but was getting pressure from his boss to get your report to him. So now he has to stay and read it. He’s not unhappy with you at all; he just didn’t do a good job of managing his time.

Our brains love to take shortcuts, and it’s natural for us to mind read so we can, again, fill in missing information. We have to work hard to break the habit and not read anything into a scene that’s not really there. The best way to interpret Mike is to not interpret

anything at all. If you're curious, you can ask Mike how he feels about the report. Then you'll have your answer and you won't have to mind read.

A couple of antidotes to mind reading include:

- 1) Nothing is good or bad until it's verbalized, and
- 2) Ask if you really want to know rather than make stuff up and suffer.

Become aware of how often you mind read and if there are particular people that you mind read more often than others. Once you do that, you can catch yourself when you're doing it, and put a new habit into place when you find yourself mind reading.

Assigning Responsibility

Whenever something goes wrong, we tend to look for the reason. A person who never takes responsibility will blame others and will not think it's their fault. On the other hand, a person who takes too much responsibility and constantly blames themselves for everything is at high risk for depression. Here is an example of each:

Taking too little responsibility: "I missed the bus. It wasn't my fault I was late."
(Missing the bus is totally in my control – I need to get up earlier.)

Taking too much responsibility: "Three people unsubscribed to my newsletter. I must be a bad writer." (It could be the individuals changed emails, jobs, or interests, which had nothing to do with the change.)

Both taking too little and too much responsibility are thinking traps. I prefer an entirely different approach than what the psychology textbooks say about this one. I simply focus on results, and unless there's something to learn from the past, I don't think backwards.

From the examples above, it's clear that I need to set my alarm and get up earlier to catch the bus. I can also have a neighbor on call to drive me or pay for a cab in the rare cases I make a mistake and don't hear the alarm. That way, I can hit the result close to 100 percent of the time – I will be on time – and not be left with lame excuses as to why I didn't hit the result.

In the case of newsletter unsubscribes, I can set a threshold. If more than 10 percent of my list unsubscribes in any one week, I know I need to troubleshoot it. Otherwise, no action needs to be taken.

Negative Filtering

Negative filtering is when you see or remember only the bad and not the good. For example, a speaker gets 99 perfect scores on their audience evaluations and 1 criticism.

Of course, they focus on the one criticism and forget about the other 99 happy audience members. If your boss praises you, then makes a suggestion for improvement, you only remember the negative comment.

If you find yourself thinking like this, you are filtering out the good and only remembering the bad. This comes from our default brain wiring from cave man days.

To avoid this thinking trap, focus on seeing the entire picture – good, bad, and neutral – rather than selectively filtering negative sensory input. You can improve this with attention-strengthening tools such as mindfulness and meditation, covered in Chapter Seven.

Transforming Thinking Traps to New Truths

Review the thinking traps in this section, and make a note of where they might be causing you unnecessary stress. Write down your plan for changing your thinking and therefore changing your truth.

□ Understanding Your Explanatory Style

One of the tools in *The Resilience Factor* is called explanatory style and it affects your ability to solve problems. There are three components to an individual's explanatory style:

1. **Cause of the problem:** Is the problem caused by me or is it outside of my control? This is the same as assigning responsibility that we just covered. We can blame others, or we can blame ourselves.

If we're constantly thinking "it's not my fault," then we may be ducking responsibility and control. On the contrary, if we are always saying "it's my fault that happened," then we may be taking the fall too often for others. Neither is healthy; however, I prefer to take responsibility more often than not because that's where the control is. For example, if I see the plant not getting watered, I

can avert a problem by addressing it. I'm not necessarily taking blame, but I'm taking responsibility to prevent a future problem. To me, this is better than saying a week later, "it's not my fault the plant died. I wasn't the one who was supposed to water it."

Notice what style you are by default (and it might be different depending on the area of your life), and decide whether that thinking pattern serves you or stresses you. Can you change your truth to be more proactive and more powerful for you? "I could have set the alarm for an earlier time so I won't miss the bus next time." "I noticed there was a miscommunication in who was supposed to water the plant even though it wasn't my turn."

2. **Time perspective of a problem:** Is a problem specific to one situation in your life, i.e., is it a temporary thing, or is it longer lasting?

A great tip on how you look at time perspective is if you often use the words "never" and "always" in your thinking. Examples include: "I'll never lose weight." "I'm always last." When you generalize your thinking to "forever" time, you increase your stress.

Notice what style you are by default (it might be different depending on the area of your life), and decide whether that thinking pattern serves you or stresses you. Can you change your truth to be more specific time-wise and more powerful for you? "I haven't lost weight in the last three months, but I did lose weight in 1992 and kept it off for 9 years." "I did place last in this triathlon, but at least I finished."

3. **Scope perspective:** Is a problem specific to one area of your life, or does it affect all areas of your life?

A great tip on how you look at scope perspective is if you often use the words "everything" or "everybody" or "nothing" or "nobody". Examples include: "Nobody can be trusted these days." "Everything breaks when I touch it." When you generalize your thinking to all circumstances and areas of your life, you increase your stress.

Notice what style you are by default (and it might be different depending on the area of your life), and decide whether that thinking pattern serves you or stresses you. Can you change your truth to be more specific scope-wise and more powerful for you? "I made a poor hiring choice in 1999, but I'll be more careful next time." "The printer broke, but that doesn't mean I'm jinxed."

When you can understand your explanatory style, you can head off some of your exaggerated thinking before it causes you unnecessary stress. Watch for words like

never, always, everything, everyone, and fault to look for areas where you can implement adjustments to your thinking style.

□ **Being Right or Related**

This is one of my favorite relationship tools that I personally created. Our brains have a strong need to “be right” when we’re talking with a friend or family member. This tool helps you realize the impact on the other person of always wanting to be right.

Let’s say you and your husband are recalling a memory of what you wore on the day you met. You remember one thing and he remembers something else. You’re sure that your memory is accurate and his is wrong. He’s sure that his memory is accurate and yours is wrong!

See what happens? The need for both people to be right drives them apart. This is the exact opposite result that both of them really wanted when remembering a sentimental anniversary. You can either:

1. Be right and stand alone in your “righteousness,” paying a big cost and driving a wedge between you and the other person, or
2. Give up being right and instead, be related and connected positively to the person.

It’s so interesting, because ego unconsciously thinks it’s being so clever by getting “right” points or “smart” points from the other person, when it’s really making the other person feel stupid. Being right always makes one person feel smart and the other feel stupid. Is it worth making the other person feel stupid to be right?

Is it really worth being so right that you lose connection with another human being? I believe it usually isn’t, unless morals and values are violated. Usually the only thing that’s violated is ego, and ego does not understand the consequences of the disconnection.

You have to pick your battles and understand the cost of being right. If you’re someone who really needs to be “right” all the time, revisit your strategy and look at what it’s costing you.

□ **Five Resiliency Tools**

Here is the list of resilience tips and tools that we covered in this chapter:

1. “Blow Off Steam” List
2. Making Friends with Your Inner Critic

3. Thinking Traps to Avoid
 - a. Jumping to Conclusions
 - b. Catastrophic Thinking
 - c. Mind Reading
 - d. Assigning Responsibility
 - e. Negative Filtering
4. Understanding Your Explanatory Style
5. Being Right or Related

Now, you have five new resiliency tools that can help you reduce your stress. If your thoughts are a major cause of your stress, then I encourage you to keep a diary of thoughts or to do some daily journaling. You can apply the exact same technique we used in Chapter Two to implement the ideas in this chapter.

Keep a blank sheet of paper handy as you go through the day. Capture your thoughts in real time on paper so that by the end of the day you have a list of thoughts. Just like you listed your activities in Chapter Two, you can list your thoughts. Thoughts are best captured in real time, however, so you'll be making your list throughout the day instead of trying to recall your thoughts at the end of the day.

Once you have your list, you can use your red and green highlighters to note what thoughts are causing you stress. And you can use the right column to write down tools from this chapter that you can use to change your thoughts to be more positive.

For example, if your morning is so hectic that you're worried about being on time all morning and your mind starts thinking, "I'm always late," then you have some great tools to change that thought. Understand the trap that your explanatory style is falling into, remove that word "always" and focus on today's meeting. Then you can use reframing, making friends with your inner critic, and changing your catastrophic thinking into a more powerful, supportive thought for the day.

You can also schedule items from your blow-off steam list into your activities liberally and frequently so that your stress will go way down and your creativity and positivity will go way up.

Now that we have your thoughts de-stressed, let's work on de-stressing your body in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: De-Stress Your Body

By now, you've definitely lightened your stress level, but why stop now? Let's go for healthy and thriving so you can take a giant positive leap in your business and your life.

In this chapter, we'll take a look at some of the traditional ways to de-stress, but we'll approach them knowing you're busy and you want low-cost solutions. We'll cover:

1. Taking a micro-vacation
2. Low-cost solutions to self-care and pampering
3. Non-traditional forms of exercise
4. Nutrition
5. Sleep

All of these solutions get you moving and/or pamper your body, which are both great things to reduce your stress.

□ Micro-Vacation

Many of your friends may be taking time off this summer to go to an exotic place. You may be as well. Why wait for that one or two weeks a year to have that free and exciting vacation feeling? Take a micro-vacation anytime you want, several times a week.

A micro-vacation is very short experience of something new. It can be as simple as trying a new food to as exotic as taking a new day trip to a nearby city.

Micro-vacations are rejuvenating and interesting. They also generate many positive emotions. If you're burned out and sick of your routine, a micro-vacation is the perfect solution for you. If you're overwhelmed with too many new things in your life already, I don't recommend this tool for you right now. Instead, try to stabilize and routinize as much of your life as possible, and skip to the next tool in this chapter.

Here's a list of new experiences to get your juices flowing:

- New restaurant
- New person (to ask for lunch, for example)
- New club
- New post office, bank branch, gas station, or other variation on your routine
- New dance, foreign language, or musical instrument
- New game
- New fruit, dish, vegetable, or drink

- New plant for your garden
- New book or magazine
- New movie, play, or concert
- New hiking path or park visit
- New duty at work
- New swimming pool, gym, yoga workout, or jogging path

This is a great tool if you feel like you are in a rut or you feel like you need to add some creativity or freshness to your life. If you have a family, get everyone involved and share the fun.

If You Have More Time

On the days or half-days you can sneak out of the office, keep your activities as relaxing as possible. Play with your pet, watch a movie, go to the spa, socialize with friends, grab a nap, or read a novel.

It doesn't make sense to watch a horror movie or any of the grizzly cop shows that track serial killers on TV. This increases our cortisol, which increases our stress! Instead, watch a romance story, an animal or nature documentary, or a comedy. These help oxytocin and endorphins flow, the love and happy chemicals that we have.

□ Self-Care

Self-care is a huge form of stress reduction. It encompasses a number of practices that are designed to pamper us, and in some cases, help us look good too.

When we think of self-care, we might instantly think of massages, but there's much more we can do in this area and without busting our budgets (which could stress us out more). You've heard "don't sweat the small stuff." I don't want you to *sweat* the small stuff, but I do want you to pay attention to it. When you can change a dozen small things about your day, the uplift you get is bigger than you realize. Please don't discount the "smaller" ideas before you've tried them.

Here is a list of low-cost ideas for self-care. Make the time so that your habit sticks.

1. Sing or whistle. My dad was huge whistler, doing it every day of his life.
2. Take a bath. Enjoy the water with or without Epsom salts, bubbles, and a rubber ducky.

3. Dance. Put on some great music, and let go when no one is watching. Do not put off dancing because you think you have to wait until you get all dressed up and get together with your girlfriends to go on a night out on the town. Just one song in the middle of your office is enough to blast your stress.
4. If you have a gym membership, enjoy the sauna there instead of making a special trip to another place.
5. If you get sick, don't try to be superperson. Delegate urgent chores to a trusted friend, and get someone to take care of you for a change.
6. If you want a massage and need to stick to a budget, go for a foot or shoulder massage at your nearby health foods store instead of the one-hour full body massage.
7. Swim in a pool but don't do laps; just play and splash around. Or at least dangle your feet into the water while you sit on the edge.
8. If you like to cook, make a new recipe with all of the ingredients in your cupboard and refrigerator.
9. Mix and match your current clothes into a new outfit that you've never worn before.
10. Sit on a park bench and watch the butterflies, birds, babies, or passersby.
11. Make a list of what makes you feel good, what makes you laugh, and what makes you satisfied, and post it somewhere where you can see it every day.
12. If you're crafty, collect all of your keepsakes and photographs and make an album or scrapbook.
13. Do something you haven't done since you were a kid. When I was 30, I used to get very stressed out, so I got some coloring books and crayons, and went at it while I watched Saturday morning cartoons.
14. Take a break from the phones and the computers for a whole day.
15. Write in a journal. Three pages is usually enough to give you the aha.
16. Visit an art or science museum to exercise different brain cells once in a while.
17. Call a relative you haven't spoken to in years.

18. Ask a close friend about a part of their life you don't know anything about.
19. Ask yourself what your most cherished non-material possession is.
20. Create a vision board from old magazines.
21. Remember a hobby you haven't done in years, and do it.
22. Buy motivational tapes on sale and listen to them.

If you have more budget for self-care, which I recommend, then you can create an entire self-care support team. Here's what that should look like.

Self-Care Support Team

If you are running a family household and a business or career, there's no way you can do it yourself. Plus, it's no fun that way. The first step is to build a team of individuals that can support you in the ways you need supporting. And the second step is to get organized, setting the routine appointments you need by getting help from a personal assistant.

I actually block an entire day out of each week for personal care: right now it's Wednesdays. It's rare that I will set a coaching or vendor appointment on Friday because that's my day to do what I need to in order to work at my most creative maximum or simply to maintain my health. I schedule whatever I need to do that week: doctor appointments, hair stylists, dentist, manicure, wardrobe consultant, blood test, etc. For example, this Wednesday, I'm overdue for a facial and I need to schedule time with a new eye doctor.

Here are some conventional and unconventional specialists you can have on your team to fully support you and to reduce your stress in varying ways:

1. Traditional medical doctors, including dentists and specialists.
2. Chiropractors, acupuncturists, and alternative medicine professionals.
3. Nutritionists (we have a section on this coming up).
4. Cook.
5. Personal trainer or a health club membership.
6. Esthetician, massage therapist.
7. Manicurist, hairstylist, makeup artist.
8. Wardrobe consultant, personal shopper.

Implemented correctly, each has the potential to save you more time than you currently spend doing these tasks.

You might think the wardrobe consultant is a real splurge, but think about how much time you spend going shopping, looking for outfits, trying things on, and buying things that don't look that great on you or that hang in your closet and never get worn. In about five to six hours once or twice a year with a personal shopper, you could be done and look better than you ever have, with no wasted or foolish purchases.

For household and business support, I highly recommend:

1. Housekeeper.
2. Gardener.
3. Nanny and/or babysitter.
4. Caterer and/or event planner.
5. Personal assistant who helps around the house, runs errands such as grocery shopping, dry cleaning, and the drug store.
6. Office assistant who helps with filing, faxing, mailing, appointment-setting, screening calls, and other administrative duties.

Of course, for business, you can have an entire team under you, and that's beyond the scope of this book.

I'm sure you can get really carried away with more ideas such as chauffeur (or these days you can use Lyft or Uber), butler, secretary, and more, but the point is to find the right team for you that will help you reduce your stress.

If you're reading through this saying to yourself, "this is not for me," I encourage you to think twice. You've likely got some guilt going on that you may want to work through. Learn to receive and be supported by a wonderful team of professionals, and watch your stress go down.

□ Non-Traditional Exercise

You probably already know that exercising, playing sports, and doing any physical activity will reduce your stress. Exercising is the second most popular way people reduce their stress, after music.

We can't just get rid of stress in our heads through mind games; it doesn't work that way. We need to be plugged into our bodies' feelings to melt muscle tension and to get our autonomic nervous system relaxed. That's why exercise – or if you prefer just moving around a lot – is probably the biggest stress-buster of all.

The key is not to resist doing it. If you hate doing exercise – even the thought of the word exercise turns you off – then we definitely need to label it something different so that you'll look forward to it every day. Think of a word that works for you: movements,

working out, keeping fit, training, dancing, motion, shuffle, stretch, energy boost, or your own.

All types of exercise are good for your body and for reducing your stress. Here are a few examples:

- Ballet, tap, jazz, ballroom, country, square, all kinds of dancing
- Ice skating, roller skating
- Tumbling, gymnastics, cheerleading
- Physical defense classes (karate, aikido, krav maga, BJJ, muay thai, judo, taekwondo, boxing, etc.)
- Swimming, water aerobics, water ballet
- Weight training with machines and free weights
- Horseback riding
- Running, treadmill, or other cardio
- Rock or wall climbing
- Sports, as in basketball, soccer, football, baseball, volleyball, tennis, golf, and other team sports
- Fast walking or hiking a strenuous path
- Cycling, spinning, or rowing
- Obstacle course
- Pilates, Zoomba, Barre, or any of the latest trends in fitness classes
- Yoga, tai chi

All of these exercises except swimming are weight-bearing, which are great to keep bones strong and stave off osteoporosis in your later years.

What exercise do you love the most? Schedule a time for it on your calendar at least once a week, and start doing it.

What exercise have you not done in a long time? Is there one you did as a kid? For me, it's swimming. Growing up with a pool in my backyard allowed me to become part fish. Swimming in the water now is one long luxurious massage. Find the exercise that resonates with you. It may very well be the one you did as a kid.

What routine can you create around exercising? Perhaps you can take a weekly walk with a neighbor. Is your bank or grocery close enough to walk to? Can you join a soccer or tennis league?

Get involved in competitions or classes. Enter a 5K or 10K run. This adds a goal-setting component, which is a double-dip benefit to reduce your stress. Attend classes to get the camaraderie and continuity benefits in addition to the exercise.

□ Nutrition

I'm not a nutrition expert but my friend, affiliate partner, and personal nutrition coach JJ Virgin is, and since stress and nutrition greatly impact each other and are intertwined, I didn't want to leave the topic out of this book. I asked JJ to send me some tips on reducing stress through nutrition.

Celebrity nutrition and wellness expert JJ Virgin is a public speaker, media personality and best-selling author of *Six Weeks to Sleeveless and Sexy*, *The 5-Step Plan to Sleek, Strong and Sculpted Arms*. JJ has a multitude of educational degrees and programs to her credit, including a PhD in Holistic Nutrition, a degree in Exercise Science from UCLA and graduate coursework in 6 different graduate and doctoral programs. She is a Board Certified Nutrition Specialist with the American College of Nutrition, Board Certified in Holistic Nutrition, and has several other certifications to her credit.

In her nutrition practice, she sees a lot of people, and almost all of them suffer from stress. Here is what she sent me:

What happens chemically inside your body

Your adrenal glands produce two hormones, DHEA and cortisol. When you are under stress, your adrenal glands shift from producing optimal levels of DHEA to produce more cortisol to deal with the crisis.

Over time, you can't keep up with the demand, and cortisol starts to decrease as well. Lower DHEA means that your body can't burn fat as well and can lead to lower levels of testosterone, which reduces your ability to build muscle and impacts your sex drive. High cortisol raises blood sugar, increases sugar and carb cravings, makes you anxious, can cause insomnia due to elevated cortisol and adrenaline and lowered serotonin, lowers stomach acid and thus impairs digestion, breaks down muscle and can cause you to lay down fat around your waistline and worst yet, raises the "setpoint" at which you can burn off that fat.

When you exhaust your adrenals from long-term chronic stress, you can't produce as much cortisol anymore. This lower cortisol sends your body into "famine physiology" where it lowers your metabolic rate and conserves energy making it darn near impossible to lose weight, AND if you try to do so by drastically lowering your caloric intake and over-exercising (if you are even able to get moving at this point), you just get worse.

5 tips to reduce stress through nutrition and wellness

Thankfully, I have some solutions that you can deploy NOW to start digging out of this metabolic black hole that are also fiscally sound as well! So no excuses, quit whining and get into action, the responsibility to turn things around begins with each of us!

1. **Eat Real Food!** That processed, packaged chemical cuisine is not only not your best choice for your health but also more expensive. Get back to basics with real food – lots of nonstarchy veggies, chicken, etc. – and hit the local farmer’s market for great bargains on produce that is grown locally and is in season.
2. **Lose the Latte and go green.** I tallied up my Starbucks bill and realized I could feed a family in a third world country with what I am spending there. While I am not willing to stop my Starbucks experience (I simply love them calling my name and handing over my venti cup of heaven), I have made the change to a green tea instead. My venti green tea costs less than half of what a deluxe coffee drink does, AND it benefits your health as well. Green tea boosts your metabolism, supports healthy adrenals due to its theanine content and is rich in antioxidants. Plus I can fill it back up with hot water and get another whole cup!
3. **Get back to alphabet basics with your Bs and Cs and supplement with high-quality vitamins.**
 - a. Take a Vitamin B supplement every day which lowers stress. The modern diet, high in sugar, alcohol and devitalized foods, leads to lower levels of B vitamins. B vitamins are some of the most important factors in mental health. Low levels of folic acid, B12, thiamine, riboflavin, and B6 have all been associated with mood disorders, and supplements of these nutrients have been used successfully to correct them. The brain requires lots of the B vitamins for repair and proper maintenance of proper brain neurotransmitter and adrenal function.
 - b. Take Vitamin C, which is a building block for adrenal steroid biosynthesis. Vitamin C is depleted from the adrenal cortex when cortisol is secreted.
 - c. Consider also supplementing with Phosphatidylserine, DHEA, and GABA, but for these, you really need to be under the care of a doctor or nutritionist who can get you the right dosages.
4. **Burst to blast fat.** If you’re doing endurance training, switch to burst training. You don’t have to exercise for hours to make a difference through exercise. You can actually exercise for less time and lose more weight! Burst training is the best exercise to blast fat. Spend one minute exercising full out and then spend two minutes recovering. Do this for four bursting minutes per day, and watch the fat fall off.
5. **Build in some daily downtime and bliss.** When I ask my clients what they do for themselves on a regular basis for fun or relaxation they look at me like I am crazy and when pressed, can’t come up with a thing! I make it their mandatory homework to find something that they do everyday that is ultimate bliss for them

– this is unique to you but some great ideas are taking a warm bath with a great novel, talking with a positive friend or taking your dog for a walk.

For more tips on nutrition and stress, visit my affiliate link and JJ's website at <https://jjvirgin.com/> and subscribe to her free newsletter.

Thanks, JJ, for all your great tips.

□ Sleep

Lack of sleep and poor sleep quality is a national crisis. According to the 2013 American Psychological Association Stress in America survey, 21 percent of adults report feeling more stressed when they do not get enough sleep and adults with higher reported stress levels (eight, nine or 10 on a 10-point scale) fare even worse — 45 percent feel even more stressed if they do not get enough sleep.

Without a good night's rest, your stress just compounds. Side effects include forgetting things and losing track of what you were saying right in the middle of a conversation.

Among other things, the brain needs five 90-minute sleep cycles to perform “memory consolidation” every night. Your brain takes all of the new input (experiences, senses, memories) you've fed it during the day and performs a sort of disk defragmentation. It compares and contrasts these new memories with older ones to see if it can make some patterns and match things up. It creates associations, which is why you wake up having solved a problem. So don't shortchange your sleep. You'll be a better decision-maker when you get a decent night's rest.

My friend Robin Nielsen is a sleep expert. As the Founder of the Juvenescence Wellness Center, Robin is a Certified Nutrition Consultant, Board Certified in Holistic Nutrition[®]. Formerly the co-owner of a multimillion-dollar commercial printing company in Silicon Valley, Robin knows first-hand how nutrition and stress play vital roles in daily health. In her practice, she specializes in helping women get the restorative sleep they need to think more clearly, balance hormones, improve moods, and enhance energy to be at the top of their game. I asked Robin to put together some tips for us on sleep, and here they are:

“Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.”

Thomas Decker, English dramatist (1572-1632)

Lack of sleep is the #1 stressor on our bodies. This is because lack of sleep raises cortisol levels, our stress hormone. When this happens, our immune system is suppressed, inflammation increases, hormones and brain chemistry become imbalanced, and, if you chronically don't get enough sleep, disease happens. We gain weight, get sick more often,

are more prone to cardiovascular disease, low libido, diabetes, anxiety, depression and more. It's not a pretty picture!

While most of us pride ourselves on how little sleep we need, we don't realize the impact it has on our bodies long term. As adults, sleep is actually needed for beauty inside and out. Imagine, for a moment, that you had 7-9 hours of restful sleep last night, without the use of sleeping pills. How do you feel today? If you're like most, you are happy, well-balanced, clear thinking and motivated. Don't you feel wonderful just thinking about it?

You have insomnia if:

- You have trouble falling asleep
- You have trouble staying asleep
- Sleep dominates your thinking
- You're tired or lack energy during the day
- You use medications to sleep

Trouble sleeping indicates a body out of balance. Here are my top 10 Tips for getting a restful night's sleep:

Tip #1 Eat Your Way to Better Sleep

Proper eating habits will balance your hormones for a restful night's sleep. Eat a low glycemic meal within an hour of waking and never go more than 5 hours between meals, (except for dinner and breakfast the next morning). Avoid eating grains with only fruits or vegetables. Always make sure you eat a healthy protein (meat, eggs, cottage cheese, fish), fat (avocado, olive oil, butter, nuts/seeds, coconut oil/milk) and carbohydrate (vegetable, fruit, whole grain or legume) every time you eat.

Tip #2 Avoid Stimulants

If you're a coffee or black tea drinker, do not consume any caffeine after noon. If you are not sleeping restfully now, do not consume caffeine at all until you are in a regular sleeping pattern again, and you find that it works OK for you. Even decaf coffee has caffeine. Tobacco is very stimulating, as well as sugar in the form of cookies, crackers, cake, white bread, pasta, pastries, etc.

Tip #3 Avoid Alcohol

While alcohol can initially make you feel better after a stressful day, it can be dehydrating, lower blood sugar, and cause our liver to work too hard which can cause restless sleep. For some it can even be a stimulant. If you're trying to get some rest, you'll need to avoid it for awhile until you're falling asleep easily and staying asleep. Then you can add it back in by sticking to one drink, after you've eaten, and having it as early in the day as possible - OK sometime after noon but before 6pm.

Tip #4 DIM the Lights!

As dark approaches you naturally make the sleep hormone melatonin. The energy hormone cortisol decreases, as our nighttime sleep hormone (and immune protective hormone) increases to help us sleep and restore. You will not produce enough melatonin for a restful night's sleep if you are looking at a bright computer screen at night, have bright lights on in your home or office (if you're still at work), or are watching a big, bright, TV screen. Use area lighting instead of overhead lights, dim the light on your computer screen if you need to keep working, wear some rose-colored glasses (can increase melatonin production up to 70%) and turn off the TV. You will fall asleep more quickly and will stay asleep much longer.

Tip #5 Exercise

Moderate, not excessive, exercise helps you to burn off stress hormones to help you sleep at night. The key here is not to exercise too late, though, because that could be too stimulating for restful, restorative sleep. So, resistance training such as weights or bands, yoga or pilates or short burst workouts are great for any time before 5pm. After 5pm restorative exercises such as calming, stretching yoga, Tai Chi, stretching, etc. are wonderful before bed to calm the nervous system.

Tip #6 Set a Routine

Our bodies love routine. Get up at the same time everyday and go to bed around the same time every evening - preferably no later than 10:30pm. Your body's hormones will get used to, and will thrive, on this routine.

Tip #7 Save Your Bed for Two Things

Yes, that's sleep and sex. According to People Magazine in the May 2009 issue, Sleep is the New Sex, "Everyone is talking about it but no one is getting enough." Keep work and TV out of the bedroom.

Tip #8 Make Your Bedroom Completely Dark

Even the slightest amount of light, either from street lights or from your digital clock, can disrupt your favorite sleep hormone melatonin. Make your bedroom pitch black - think cave. Be sure to keep any electronic devices that are plugged in at least 6 feet away from your head and try to have as few in your bedroom as possible. For any with lights, be sure they are completely covered so no light shows through.

Tip #9 Address Your Body's Imbalances

Do you have anemia? Is your liver functioning properly? Have you been on overdrive for quite some time and are now chronically tired? Do you have an underlying infection that you haven't addressed or don't know you have? Work with a health care professional (a nutritionist is a great start) to figure out what is going on with your body that may be disrupting your ability to fall asleep or stay asleep.

Tip #10 Find the Joy in Your Life

Oftentimes we work too much and play too little. We're so stressed out at the end of the day that we turn to things that make sleep impossible. Find something you love doing and get reconnected with that. Do it regularly as it will help to keep your hormones balanced, and the stress hormones down so you can sleep at night. Plus, you'll be happier and won't obsess about the little things at bedtime.

For more tips on sleep and stress, visit Robin's website at <http://juvenescence.net/> and subscribe to her free newsletter.

Thanks, Robin, for all your great tips.

□ **Scheduling Self-Care**

Here's a list of tools we covered in this chapter to de-stress your body:

1. Taking a micro-vacation
2. Low-cost solutions to self-care and pampering
3. Non-traditional forms of exercise
4. Nutrition
5. Sleep

Now, you have five new self-care tools that can help you reduce your stress. Go back to your activities list in Chapter Two, and let's see how we can implement some of the dozens of ideas in this chapter.

Look for any activities that are still "red" on your list with no suggestion on the right-hand column. Could any of the activities be improved by the self-care tips in this chapter? If not, you may just want to reward yourself right after you make it through a "red" activity, and schedule a self-care activity into your day. Remember, it doesn't have to be long; an activity like singing on your low-cost self-care list doesn't take up any additional time at all.

Schedule tools from this chapter into your activities before you plan anything else. Self-care is too important to get left out. For example, plan in your exercise, meals, and some self-care first before you add your other responsibilities for the day.

One last chapter will get you into advanced class: de-stressing and beautifying your brain.

Chapter Seven: Beautify Your Brain

The methods presented in this chapter are the ones you're more likely to associate with traditional stress-reduction techniques. You may have heard about them before, but I encourage you not to skip this chapter, especially the section on breathing. These are powerful techniques that take little or no extra time to work into your day and will give you an instant serenity boost.

In this chapter, we'll cover:

1. Breathing
2. Awareness
3. Mindfulness
4. Biofeedback
5. Meditation

□ Breathing

Breathing is my number one favorite stress reducer. In only three breaths, you can change your entire physiology. Your brain needs a lot of oxygen, and whenever you want to wake up or think more clearly, inhale deeply as if you're sending a nice fresh batch of oxygen right up to your brain. Feels great!

The challenge for most people is they breathe too quickly and too shallowly. I have paced my breathing against others, and I regularly take one long slow deep breath in the same time that others take two or three breaths. This one habit, the way I breathe, keeps my stress level *way down*. You can learn to do it too.

Here's how to breathe: Inhale long and slowly, first filling your stomach, then your upper chest and filling your lungs completely. Hold it at the top for a few moments, and slowly let it out chest first, then belly. Start the process over again two more times. Then begin to breathe more normally but still slower and deeper than you normally do.

Don't try to take a one-minute inhale the first time you breathe deeply, or you'll choke. Just keep lengthening your breath as it's comfortable and work up to a longer breath.

You can use your exhale to reduce tension in your body. Relax your muscles and exhale at the same time. You can even do a sort of shrug while you exhale to get the tension out.

Breathing – the type you concentrate on while doing – is a foundational skill for other relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and biofeedback. It's a great skill to

have, and when you really focus on just your breathing – every aspect of the in and out – your awareness will increase as you discover things like no two breaths are the same.

Once you've taken your three deep breaths and begin breathing normally again, you can add a body scan for further relaxation. A body scan is where you mentally visit each body part from head to toe to release any remaining tension and to relax completely. For example, one at a time, you would relax your:

Neck, head, face, eyelids, nostrils, cheeks, mouth, jaw, lips,
Shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists, hands, fingers,
Chest, back, ribcage, stomach, belly, hips, groin,
Thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet, toes.

Don't rush or force your relaxation routine; spend several minutes on this for best results.

By then, you're likely to be asleep!

□ Awareness

One of our mind's advanced abilities is the ability to objectively observe ourselves and what we're thinking at the same time we're doing something. This is what we call self-awareness. Awareness is simple, yet profound, and there are many fascinating layers to it.

One of the key steps to be able to reduce your stress is to become aware of when you're most affected by it. Awareness is the best tool for this, and when you can bring anything into your scope of attention, you can then describe it, measure it, and take steps to get rid of it. Use awareness to identify your stress triggers to see if you can reduce them or at least have some stress-reducing tools ready to use.

Awareness is not the same as self-consciousness, which is a somewhat paranoid version of self-awareness. It's critical that when we begin to increase our awareness that we do so without judgment. We simply want to observe.

You also want to be careful not to become hyper-aware, which could lead to hypochondriac behavior.

Think of increasing awareness as getting to know *you* better. We're turning on the "observer of us" inside us. It can almost feel like there are two people in there! One is doing the doing and one is watching the doing. It's like you're waking up to who you are. It's very exciting!

You are recognizing yourself. You are making friends with yourself. You are connecting with yourself in a whole new way. If you are new to this, you should feel a whole new level of control that you haven't felt before.

There are so many types and levels of awareness. You can watch yourself as you are with others to see how they might be perceiving you, which is social awareness. There is also self-management. Let's say you have a bad habit of biting your nails. As you become more aware of doing so, you can decide to change the habit and stop doing it, a form of self-management.

Without awareness, a person has an extremely limited view of themselves and will have no idea what impact their actions have on others or even themselves. We must work on increasing our self-awareness so we can take stock, assess our thoughts and actions, and make the appropriate habit changes, especially related to reducing stress.

When you are aware, you may also be experiencing more of the present moment. And that leads us into our discussion on mindfulness.

□ Mindfulness

A higher level of awareness is mindfulness, where we are engaged totally in the present and are acutely aware of how we are interacting with every part of our environment including ourselves and other people.

Mindfulness, like meditation, is a bit misunderstood. There are tremendous benefits to your brain that most people don't realize. Practicing mindfulness strengthens your ability to pay attention and concentrate. Mindfulness practitioners are able to hold attention much longer than others, so this is a perfect activity to add to your practice if you're an easily distracted person. This will help you from getting distracted and allow you to focus for a longer period of time without needing a break.

The best time to use mindfulness is when you are doing a menial task and your mind normally wanders. Driving, doing the dishes, and completing household chores are good examples. Instead of thinking about your to do list or your current problems, focus on the task and turn up your five senses.

For example, when you're washing dishes, how do your hands feel in the suds? Is the water cold or hot? Do the plates and glasses look shiny? What does washing dishes sound like? Smell like? Focus on the details of the object you're holding.

Although you don't need a course to learn mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn has developed an extremely popular program called Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Practitioners go through a rigorous training program to become certified, and there are

now hundreds of graduates around the world who teach this course to anyone who is interested.

The 8-week course combines meditation and yoga to teach moment-to-moment awareness. Studies show that diseases such as psoriasis were cleared sooner with mindfulness practice than without. It also boosts immune function, reducing sick days, and shows cognitive improvements.

□ **Biofeedback**

Some people have never learned how to physically relax. If you tell them to relax, they squeeze their face, tighten their shoulders, and brace themselves. They really don't know how. If you are one of these people, biofeedback could be a good solution.

With biofeedback, you can lower your stress levels by actually controlling parts of your autonomic nervous system, such as blood pressure, body temperature, heart rate, perspiration, and breathing. You may have heard of contemplative monks who spend months alone meditating in a cave that can do miraculous-sounding mind-body control. Well, you can too. Instead of meditating, biofeedback is faster, and you can learn to control parts of your system that doctors normally say are not under your mental control.

Here's how it works: You are hooked to a special machine under the supervision of a trained psychologist, who helps you learn to relax through a mild form of hypnotherapy. The machine measures your heart rate, breathing, and skin temperature. On the computer screen, you'll see a line of activity that corresponds with your stress level.

As you relax, the line goes down, and your mind learns to lower the line and correspondingly your stress. Expect to take anywhere from three to eight sessions depending on your goals and your starting point. It's very effective, and very cool to say to people that you can raise your own body temperature just by thinking about it! (How would you like to be able to warm up your cold feet just by thinking about them?)

Some sources say that biofeedback is not indicated in patients with diabetes or patients who suffer from depression, psychosis or any other major mental health disorder. As with all medical interventions, consult a physician to see if biofeedback is the appropriate therapy.

When looking for a practitioner, be careful. Biofeedback and neurofeedback are not the same thing. There are also a lot of people practicing energy work who have no credentials or no scientific basis. If this is for you, fine, but it's not the same as what I am talking about here.

I found my biofeedback-trained psychologist through a neurologist that I went to when I had migraines. I did not want to take the migraine medication and was looking for alternatives. I was able to reduce the pain from my headaches through biofeedback training. It cost about \$100 (which was 25 years ago) per session, and I went about five or six times. My practitioner then gave me a cassette tape that I could listen to, and I still listen to it once in a blue moon.

To find your own practitioner, I recommend asking your doctors for a referral.

□ Meditation

Everyone has an opinion on meditation these days, and it's another area I feel is a bit misunderstood. It's one of the best things your can do to increase your IQ. (And in case you're one of the 50% of the population who doesn't think they can get smarter, then, guess what: Yes, you can increase your IQ, according to science.)

The other tremendous benefit of meditation is the increase in "consciousness" or conscious awareness that you get from it. In other words, meditation is the best tool I know of that will help you tap into the power of your subconscious, which is otherwise off limits to us.

If you're one of those people who thinks they can't sit still to do meditation, then you're actually one who needs it the most!

Here are the benefits based on research:

- Sara Lazar, researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital, found that meditation thickens the brain's cerebral cortex, increasing the capacity for attention, memory and decision-making. Practicing mindfulness meditation or insightfulness that focuses on the breath or an object 40 minutes per day could also slow the brain's thinning that occurs with age.⁴²
- Bruce O'Hara, associate professor of biology at University of Kentucky, found that meditation enhances mental acuity better than a nap or watching TV.⁴³ Caveat: if your body needs sleep, the nap is going to be preferable. The study needs a bit of extra explaining: subjects who meditated were less groggy and got back to work faster than those who took a nap.
- Researchers Richard Davidson and Jon Kabat-Zinn found immune system benefits from reduced stress in meditators.⁴⁴

- Practicing compassion meditation increases feelings of happiness, joy, enthusiasm, high energy, and alertness, according to Davidson's research. In advanced meditators, this capacity for happiness is seven to eight times what it is in non-meditators.⁴⁵
- Meditators score higher on the capacity for empathy than non-meditators. Paul Ekman, the world's leading authority on facial expressions, tested meditators' accuracy in describing fleeting facial expressions. Long-time meditators scored in the top two percent, surpassing policemen, lawyers, psychiatrists, customs officials, judges, and Secret Service agents.⁴⁶
- Davidson found advanced meditators do not startle easily or at all; this is a predictor of lower negative emotions.⁴⁷ Other scientists noted that meditators have better capabilities to control and lower the intensity of their emotional arousal.⁴⁸
- Wolf Singer, Director of Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt, Germany, shows that meditation increases consciousness through the synchronization of oscillatory activity in the beta- and gamma-frequency range. Both focused attention and meditation serve the brain's binding functions, heighten awareness, and lead to unification of distributed processes.⁴⁹

This last one is a real doozy: you actually have more access to your subconscious when you expand your consciousness, which means better intuition and improved decision-making.

Meditation on the Breath

Here's a quick primer on how to start meditating on your breath, the easiest form of meditation, and where most people start. In this version, there are three phases of meditation:

1. Relaxation
2. Internalization
3. Expansion

Relaxation

Get into a comfortable position. Go through your choice of relaxation techniques (described in breathing above in case you don't have one). For example, take three deep breaths to center yourself. Many people like to do a body scan where you consciously relax one body part at a time from your head to your toes.

Internalization

Then turn inward and focus on your breath. Slowly and deeply, breathing in and breathing out. Keep focusing on your breath. Soon you'll realize it's a world of its own and no two breaths are the same.

That's all you need to do. It's not doing nothing like some people describe it. Your mind is incredibly active when this is done right. Sit, be quiet, and pay attention to your breathing. Shut everything else out. Notice how the air feels against your nostril. Notice how your body fills with air. Envelop yourself in your own breathing as if it's the only thing in the world.

If you drift off and a stray thought comes into your mind, gently let it pass and move your focus back to your breath and start again. Do this as many times as you need to. As you practice, you'll find you'll drift off less and less.

You may want to add a chant that you silently say to yourself on your inhale and exhale. Sometimes this helps people focus and drift off less.

Secular:	Here (inhale)	Now (exhale)	
Buddhist:	Ami	Tabha	(means infinite light)
Christian:	Jesus	Christ	

Or make up your own. You will still want to keep focused on your breathing while chanting silently to yourself.

Expansion

Once you've developed a deep meditative flow, you'll notice changes in your state of mind during meditation. Some people call it an altered state, but one in which you are extremely present and aware. This is the beginning of what the Buddhists call enlightenment, and what neuroscientists call expanding your mind's capabilities. There are many layers of this, so the more you practice, the more you benefit.

Practice Tips

Start with 15 minutes a day and increase it over time. Set a kitchen timer so that you don't have to keep looking at the clock. Experiment with different parts of the day. My morning meditations are completely different from my evening meditations.

Also experiment with different places. Some people who are really sensitive to electromagnetic waves do better meditating away from televisions and computers. Also try using a meditation cushion on the floor versus a chair.

Build a ritual around your meditation practice just for fun. Some people build altars in a corner of the room. Others hang happiness pictures. Still others like to have a special meditation timer, trinkets, incense, plants, or crystals. It's up to you to make your meditation space scrumptious, meaningful, and inspirational.

If you find yourself falling asleep, then you are either sleep-deprived, or you are not focusing your mind. Catch up on your sleep, then try again when you're more rested.

If you're an extrovert, take a meditation class or hang out at your local Buddhist center so that you can meditate with friends.

Meditating on the breath or an object will calm the worries right out of your busy mind and put you on the path to happiness. Take 15 minutes or more each day to sit quietly and benefit from this stress reducer.

□ **Scheduling in Brain-Beautification Techniques**

In this chapter, we covered:

1. Breathing
2. Awareness
3. Mindfulness
4. Biofeedback
5. Meditation

Now, you have five new advanced tools that can help you reduce your stress. Let's go back one more time to your activities list in Chapter Two to see if any of these solutions will benefit your day.

Breathing and awareness are two items you want to make a long-term habit of. You might want to implement them with a sticky note reminder that has you thinking about them several times a day. The remaining activities you can schedule into your day as they fit. Mindfulness will fit into routine tasks such as drive time and won't take up any extra time. (You'll actually find that you'll become a much better driver, and when you're exquisitely tuned in, you'll be able to predict who will be changing lanes or turning way ahead of when they start.) If you choose to pursue meditation or biofeedback, these tasks will require extra time and research.

Summary

I hope you've had a chance to implement some of the ideas in this book. We've taken a multi-prong approach to de-stress multiple areas of your life:

1. Your activities (Chapters One and Two)
2. Your environment (Chapter Three)
3. Your relationships (Chapter Four)
4. Your thoughts (Chapter Five)
5. Your body (Chapter Six)
6. Your brain (Chapter Seven)

Stress is something that will rise and fall over the course of your lifetime as events and circumstances trigger your stress response. The best way to cope with it is to have as many tools as possible implemented throughout your day. When you do that, your baseline stress level will go down: you'll be reacting far less often to smaller stressors that once bothered you, and it will take bigger and bigger stress triggers for you to get stressed like you once did. That's how you get to stress-free living.

Final Thoughts

Since there are so many ideas in this book, consider re-visiting this content six months from now, or sooner if you have a stressful event in your life. As you move through the exercises again, you'll have an entire new set of activities, environment, and friends to improve upon and to make your life even better.

I enjoyed writing this book and I hope it was fun for you to implement many of these ideas. Hopefully, your stress level has gone way down, and your overall life is happier and more positive.

Feedback

If you have feedback for me about this book, please send me an email and tell me what was particularly useful and what wasn't. Email support@sandismith.com.

Appendix A

Here's an alternate implementation calendar if you prefer a day-by-day activity guide.

- Day 1:** Breathing (see page 80)
- Day 2:** “Blow Off Stream” List (see page 55)
- Day 3:** Focus on Your Strengths (see page 22)
- Day 4:** Sleep (see page 76)
- Day 5:** Gratitude (see page 15)
- Day 6:** De-Stress Your Schedule (see Chapter Two, page 36)
- Day 7:** Nature (see page 32)
- Day 8:** Take a Micro-Vacation (see page 68)
- Day 9:** Laughter (see page 30)
- Day 10:** Awareness (see page 81)
- Day 11:** Self-care (see page 69)
- Day 12:** Reframing (see page 12)
- Day 13:** Flow (see page 24)
- Day 14:** De-Stress Your Environment (see Chapter Three, page 43)
- Day 15:** Savoring (see page 29)
- Day 16:** Understand Your Explanatory Style (see page 64)
- Day 17:** Mindfulness (see page 82)
- Day 18:** Exercise (see page 72)
- Day 19:** Make Friends with Your Inner Critic (see page 56)
- Day 20:** Goals (see page 26)
- Day 21:** Check Your Thinking Patterns (see page 60)
- Day 22:** De-Stress Your Relationships (see Chapter Four, page 50)
- Day 23:** Express Your Positive Emotions (see page 20)
- Day 24:** Right or Related (see page 66)
- Day 25:** Nutrition (see page 74)
- Day 26:** Music (see page 33)
- Day 27:** Biofeedback (see page 83)
- Day 28:** Acts of Kindness (see page 18)
- Day 29:** Meditation (see page 84)
- Day 30:** Faith (see page 34)

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