



Own your creative power by managing your stress

1 April 2022

We continue with our theme for this year, "Own your Creative Power".

As human beings, we have creative power because we have been blessed with a brain that enables us to deal with many abstract thoughts. Our brains enable us to think ahead, visualise, and make plans to realise our visions. Our brains are capable of highly complex problem solving. Our brains are capable of innovating new concepts and ideas. And if you look at the history of man you can see this.

You don't have to be born Einstein to have a well-functioning brain. Almost everyone is capable of complex thinking. Learning plays a big role in this, and the more you use your brain, the better you will get at the tasks you repeat and practice. However, there is one thing that can greatly hamper your ability to use your brain for your benefit. If you are highly stressed (and in fact even moderately stressed) your brain cannot engage in complex and creative thinking. And you lose your ability to own your creative power.

A lot is said and written about stress and about how harmful it is. Considering this, though, many people still don't give enough attention to managing their stress. The part of your brain that is responsible for your creative power, your prefrontal cortex (right at the top and front of your brain and behind your forehead) is extremely sensitive to even everyday anxieties and worries. Stress sets off a series of chemical changes that weaken the influence of this part of the brain and what happens is that the more primitive, emotional, and reflex based parts of the brain take over. Research has shown that neurons in the prefrontal cortex disconnect and stop firing after being exposed to a flood of stress hormones. We find ourselves consumed with paralyzing anxiety or subject to impulses we seem not able to keep in check such as

eating too much, drinking too much, spending too much, and reacting without thinking. Conscious, deliberate, and proactive thinking stops. Stress not only wrecks your health; it makes you stupid too.

So how can you manage stress? The best way is to have a regular program with actions you take on a regular basis. This is much like having a regular exercise program if you want to get fit. Except you want to decrease your stress levels. Below are some pointers.



1. You want to **calm your nervous system down**. Stress triggers the stress response which sees the stress hormones flood the brain and body. Your heart rate increases, your breathing speeds up, your muscles get ready for fight or flight. The opposite of the stress response is the relaxation response, which you want to invoke if you are feeling stressed. There are various ways to do this. You can lie down and relax muscle groups one at a time. This is called progressive muscle relaxation. You can lie down and listen to relaxing music or imagine going to a relaxing scene. You can lie down and breathe deeply. And you can listen to a guided mindfulness meditation. You can find many of these on YouTube and one that I use and give to clients is the following ten-minute guided mindfulness practice. [Watch](#)
2. Secondly, stress is about our perceptions. **You can always change the way you are perceiving a situation.** A technique I often mention at seminars is the following one. When you find yourself feeling stressed out over a situation, ask yourself if there is another way to interpret the event. If you are stressed because someone has taken a lot of your time unexpectedly then remind yourself that you have helped someone out who really needed it. If you are stressed because your inbox is too full, then remind yourself that everyone is in the same situation and your inbox will never be empty. You have work to do, and that is good.
3. **Stress is defined as the perception that demands exceed resources. A way to reduce stress is to look at the demands and look at what you can do to reduce them. Or perhaps you need to increase your resources?** Can you delegate more at work? Can you get someone to cook you healthy meals for a week and store them in the freezer? Is there someone who can do your admin for you? If you work, have a young family, and possibly are studying and involved in other activities you are going to be stretched for time. It is perfectly acceptable to get help. You don't have to do everything yourself. Maybe there are activities you can cut out for now and come back to in a year or two's time. Everything doesn't have to be done right now. If you need more support around the home then go and find it. If learning

new skills would help you, then go and learn those skills. If you are not good at time management then do a course on time management.

The biggest problem I have found with managing stress is that people talk about it a lot, read up about techniques and learn them, attend seminars and workshops, and then carry on doing exactly what they always did – which is not manage their stress. Often this is because of habit and sometimes it is because we feel fine until we don't. Suddenly we crash and burn and then it's a bit too late to avoid the disastrous consequences. You need to make managing your stress levels a bit like brushing your teeth. Use a technique or two every day for a short time to prevent the build-up of huge amounts of stress and burnout. You can build a new habit. You can get into the routine of doing one stress management activity a day. And if you want to own your creative power, and realise your full potential, then managing your stress is not a luxury, it is a necessity. You simply must manage your stress levels.