Reducing Stress at Work

IDEA TOOLKIT

> Your first step to designing a less stressful day

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Modern workplaces can be major sources of stress, toxicity, overwork and burnout. These challenges often require outside interventions and changes to overall culture, much of which may feel out of your control.

What you can change, however, is your response to how daily stresses trigger you at work. Here are some ways to reduce stress when it gets out of hand.

✳ Try Single-Tasking

Our electronic devices encourage us to multitask, but research shows that multitasking doesn't make us more productive, it simply makes us feel busier. With that in mind:

- ○ Turn off pop-up notifications and push notifications on your computer and put your phone away.
- ○ Schedule dedicated periods of time to answer email and Slack messages during the day.
- ○ Finish one task before you begin the next.
- ○ Commit to an hour or more of focused work without email or Slack during parts of your day when you're less likely to be needed, like early in the morning.

✳ Protect Yourself from Secondhand Stress

Stress and negative emotions are literally contagious: Researchers have found that our cortisol levels rise simply by observing other people who are stressed out. What can we do about it? Happiness experts Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan suggest some research-backed tips, such as using behaviors that neutralize the negative effects of someone else's stress. For example, "Instead of returning a harried coworkers' stressed nonverbals with an equally stressed grimace of your own, return it with a smile or a nod of understanding."

To protect other people from your secondhand stress, try to start meetings, calls, and other encounters by saying something like, "It's so nice to talk with you," rather than "I'm so busy." This is because the first comment of a conversation often predicts the outcome. Achor and Gielan also suggest inoculating yourself against secondhand stress before going into work by practicing gratitude, exercising, or meditating. *Resource: HBR, 9/2/2015, "Make Yourself Immune to Secondhand Stress"*

✳ When You Need a Break

Taking a break at work now often involves social media or personal email, or maybe online shopping. What would happen if we disconnected from our computer screens, even for a minute, or built some stress-relieving practices into our schedule throughout our day? Consider the following to take a more mindful break:

- ○ Close your eyes and breathe deeply for ten deep breaths.
- ○ Take a brisk walk, preferably outside.
- ○ Make a list of everything you are grateful for.
- ○ Journal about something positive for two minutes.
- ○ Focus on this image for 60 seconds: When your mind wanders, gently bring it back.

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❋ Tips for Reducing Stress Throughout Your Day

How can you make every aspect of your day a little less stressful?

Waking up
- Keep your phone away from your bed. Try waking up to an old-school alarm or a sunrise light.
- Take three deep breaths before getting out of bed.
- Do some gentle stretches.

Commuting to and from work
- Try listening to music you like, or a podcast about a topic you find interesting.
- Tune into your surroundings — take note of one thing you normally wouldn't notice.

Arriving at work
- Take some time to set up and prioritize your tasks for the day before jumping into email.
- Say hi to anyone you pass on your way into work.

In a meeting
- Put your computer away. Try taking notes by hand.
- Practice active listening.
- Give everyone present the opportunity to speak, uninterrupted.

Multitasking
- Turn off pop-up notifications and push notifications.
- Put your phone in a drawer or your bag.

Feel urge to check social media
- Ask yourself the reason for checking. Is it specific and positive? If not:
  - Connect to a friend or family member outside of social media.
  - Get up, walk around and interact with people in real life.
  - Schedule specific times for checking social media and stick to them.

During lunch
- Move away from your screen. If you need entertainment, read a book or listen to music or a podcast instead.
- Take a walk, get some fresh air and sunlight, even if it's in an office parking lot.
- Observe what's on your plate. Savor each bite. Chew slowly. Take note of the different flavors and textures.

When you need to concentrate
- Switch your workspace to one with as much natural light as you can find.
- Put on headphones and listen to instrumental music or whatever helps you get in the groove.
- Have only one window open on your computer screen at a time.

Throughout the day
- Finish one task before you begin the next.
- Anytime you take a drink of water, take a deep breath.
- Do some gentle stretches.

Packing up for the day
- Review everything you need to do for the next day.
- Clean your workspace.

Upon arriving home
- Take a deep breath when you walk inside.
- Put your phone in a docking station.

Getting ready for bed
- Write down three things you're grateful for in a journal.
- Think of one thing you accomplished today.
- Do some gentle stretches.
- Breathe deeply.

❋ Circle three things that you will try today.