

SUPER STRESS SOLUTIONS NEWSLETTER

Work, Relationships / Health.

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Competent work copiers

It is true that everybody responds to stressful situations in different and unique ways. The various responses are based upon your differences in values, perceptions, habits, coping skills, support systems and just good old DNA.

You may have noticed that even though many people around you are experiencing the same stressful situation there are those who rise above the stressors and cope well while there are those who react poorly and tend to become ill and succumb to the situation.

An interesting study was conducted by Dr. John Rhodes, professor of Psychiatry at Duke University, when he noticed fifteen of his colleagues who appeared to be very successful, balanced, resilient and healthy, both mentally and physically. He also noticed another group of similar professionals who worked the same hours and had the same demands and similar jobs, i.e. accountants, lawyers and doctors, but for some reason suffered from burnout, exhaustion and pervasive stress-related illnesses. He had both groups fill out a questionnaire on lifestyle, attitudes towards work and personality. The results indicated that long hours of work or the type of work was not responsible for becoming stressed and ill. If the work is enjoyed and there is a reasonable amount of freedom of time and judgment away from negative supervision then most workers remained healthy and productive. However, the results did reveal a significant difference between the two groups, which he called the "competent copiers," and the "incompetent copiers," which depended more upon personality and lifestyle factors of the individuals rather than the inherent stressors of the job, *per se*. Dr. Rhodes identified the following:

The characteristics of the incompetent copers as:

- 1) They constantly ruminated and obsessed about work problems to the point that it interfered with their personal life.
- 2) They tended to work beyond their endurance and once productivity diminished they attempted to lengthen their work day to compensate.
- 3) They depended upon stimulants, tranquilizers, alcohol and sleep agents as a means of coping with their stressful situations.
- 4) They had a tendency to manage by crisis and lacked foresight in potential upcoming stressful situations and, as well, pride themselves in working under pressure.
- 5) They rarely engaged in regular exercise, did not schedule vacations, were unable to form and maintain friendships or have a sense of humour and laugh.

On the other hand, the competent copers' characteristics were:

- 1) They separated their work from personal life. They focused intently upon their job but took their attention away from work pressures and engaged in home and leisure activities.
- 2) They analyzed stress-producing situations and made decisions about what they had control over and what they did not, and tended to prioritize and delegate when job stressors surmounted.
- 3) They realistically expected forthcoming stressful situations, they would take breaks, withdraw temporarily and then regroup to deal with the stress.
- 4) They developed support systems, were very social, tended to express their concerns, and listened to the advice of colleagues, family and friends.
- 5) They had a high degree of altruism and interests outside of their work, and invested in their health and lifestyle and regularly scheduled and enjoyed vacations.

Do you have a bounce-back personality?

Throughout our entire lives we are shaped and formed by experiences both negative and positive. Although it is instinctive to avoid painful events while embracing positive ones, to maintain an edge in personal development it's necessary to see both forces as having significant and necessary impact on our lives to develop into a thriving, well-balanced, empowered person. Have you ever wondered how some people tend to overcome and even thrive after a significant setback in their lives while others seem to be defeated and down-trodden? Really, the impact of any setback, loss, trauma or discouraging situation is as much based on what we bring to the situation than what the situation brings to us. In fact, there is such a thing as the "bounce-back personality" and the more you factor (learn) these traits the more likely you will be to overcome life's difficulties and flourish in the face of disappointments and setbacks.

The five bounce-back personality traits are:

- 1) **A healthy self image.** Scientific studies validate that people who believe in themselves and have a good self concept tend to handle changes in their lives better than those who do not.
- 2) **A realistic take.** If you believe that you are somehow entitled to goodwill, respect, consideration from others, and good fortune just because you are a good person you will be ill-equipped to cope with unexpected situations. Unfortunately, the universe doesn't always line up in our favour as we expect and there are often negative forces that prevail regardless of how entitled we believe we are. Being realistic (not cynical) that there will be occasional difficulties allows for a more balanced approach to the inevitable bumps and roadblocks along the path of life.
- 3) **A sense of independence.** If you develop your life around neediness and co-dependence you will have a difficult time if you are forced to go it alone. If you have wrapped your identity around a person, lover, spouse or job then it will be very difficult to adjust once, and if, these identity factors have been taken from your life. No matter what person, cause or job you have, if you do not consider and prepare for the possibility that these things can be taken from you then you may be setting yourself up for a significant let-down if that loss were to occur.
- 4) **A roll-with-the-punches attitude.** Resilient people expect life to be a series of changes, frustrations and even failures, so when hit with one it is perceived as a normal part of living and not as a victimizing, catastrophic event. Really, the pessimist has an obsession with obstacles while the optimist has a passion for possibilities. The bounce-back personality perceives painful experiences as an opportunity for change and a new possibility for taking unforeseen risks in life and re-invent their lives. If you can accept occasional setbacks as a normal part of your personal development you'll become more resilient and develop the traits of a bounce-back personality.
- 5) **A flexible timetable.** Most frustrations are the result of unmet expectations. Inner turmoil takes place when we do not meet expectations within ourselves or others. Unreal expectations of huge successes, upward mobility, financial stability, health and family relationships are often met with profound disappointment when the universe does not actualize our expectations accordingly. To constantly expect perfection, high productivity and top-notch performance will create unnecessary stress and potential for future frustrations when things will likely not work out as intended. The ability to be focused but flexible and open to future possibilities will allow you to roll with the punches and bounce back from unforeseen challenges in your life.

Is your fun too much work?

Scheduling and taking time out for play is a necessary recharging mechanism allowing our body and mind to relax and refocus. However, many people consider taking time out to play as a waste of time or see it as a major vehicle to get away from all the hassles of life. The most effective fun is when it is a normal and consistent part of your lifestyle, as opposed to an isolated event. Unfortunately, most people do not know how to choose healthy leisure activities that balance and complement their work style. According to health professionals, people make five basic mistakes to planning fun.

- 1) They don't think about what kind of recreational activity is best for them, emotionally, socially and physically.
- 2) They allow someone else to choose their recreational activity for them
- 3) They choose their leisure activities for some reason other than their own benefits, i.e. business contacts.
- 4) They get involved in leisure activities for status purposes only.
- 5) They stick with something that they are good at, although it may no longer meet their needs or balance out their life.

Here are some suggestions to help balance out the demands of your work:

WORK TIME	PLAY TIME
You feel you don't have much control over your life or your situation at work.	A chance to be in charge. Instead of team activities get involved in something where you can develop the rules, the time schedule, etc.
You work under direct supervision.	An activity where nobody will be judging your performance.
You work under deadline pressures.	The chance to get above the clock. Choose an activity that you can do at your own pace and can finish in your own time.
Your job is repetitive and routine.	A mental and creative challenge. Choose an activity that will start you thinking, concentrating and exercising your creativity.
You work with machines.	Get out and rediscover the joys of being with other people, animals and nature.
You work as a member of a team.	Spend time alone. Whatever you do, don't join another team.
You work mostly alone.	More social contact. Choose an activity you can do with others.
You feel you are not doing anything for anybody else.	Do some giving. Spend time with people who appreciate your caring.

You feel you spend too much time caring for others.	A chance to be selfish. Give yourself permission to do something for yourself. Don't feel you have to apologize or explain.
You feel that life is too stimulating.	An activity that is easy-going, predictable, solitary and quiet.
You work under a great deal of pressure.	A chance to blow off steam. Physical activities are ideal for this.
Your work shows nothing tangible for your efforts.	Try making something from start to finish that can be displayed, used or worn.
Your work involves a great deal of mental activity.	An activity that requires no concentration or thought.

Private Super Stress Solutions Coaching Course

This coaching program offers you the opportunity to work one-on-one with your own coach, Mark Kent. You will receive laser-focused, proven effective techniques designed to improve your health, increase your motivation at home and work, and to empower your life.

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In next month's issue:

- What is the stressful personality?
- Are you resilience?
- Family resilience / Buffers against stress.

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