

## Falling Economy, Rising Stress

We are all facing tremendous uncertainty on economic and political fronts on top of the daily pressures to get more accomplished with fewer resources. Now more than ever many of us are feeling the effects of rising stress.

Understanding and coping with stress is critical to our emotional/physical well-being and personal productivity. You might not be aware of the numerous health related effects of stress. Here are a few sobering facts:

- Nine out of ten headaches are due to stress-induced muscle contractions in the neck or shoulders that radiate to the head.
- Stress causes forgetfulness, indecisiveness, and an inability to concentrate. Stress causes employees to produce less and make more mistakes.
- Stress is a common contributing cause of cramps, heartburn, impotence, irritable bowel syndrome, colds, flu, and many other health related problems.

In and of itself, stress is neither good nor bad. It is how we cope with stress that creates a positive or negative result. We all have "personal coping resources" that help us manage our stress such as:

- Spiritual beliefs.
- Social support of friends and family.
- Exercise routines.
- Problem-solving skills.
- Communication skills.

Taking stock of the causes of our stress and strength of our personal coping resources can help us reduce the negative effects of stress. Practically oriented self-assessments are available that help individuals identify causes of stress and weaknesses in personal coping resources. Tools such as these can help you focus on the specific areas that you need to change to improve your health and make you more productive. If you would like to receive a complimentary stress management self-assessment, please contact me.

Several books about stress management are available that provide useful advice to those of us who want to reduce the negative effects of stress. One resource, *The Stress Management Handbook*, is available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). If you are too



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stressed out to read a book, here are a few Stress Management Tips that I hope you will find helpful:

### **Stress Management Tips**

#### **... about Problem Solving:**

- If you perceive a problem, solve it now. It is easier to deal with problems before they become too serious.
- Carefully define the problem. What is the source of the problem?
- Separate people from the problem. What is the behavior that is causing the problem? Attack the problem, not the people.
- Determine your desired outcome. What is your goal in solving the problem? If others are involved, focus on shared interests and outcomes.
- List a variety of creative and practical solutions to the problem. Whether you solve the problem yourself or share it with others, a list of ideas often helps you discover new alternatives. Don't get trapped into thinking there is only "one" resolution. Try some new approaches you haven't used before.

#### **... about Communication:**

- Listen to understand, not to judge.
- Focus on the message sent by the person you are listening to. Pay attention to both the content of the message and the feelings being expressed.
- Use "reflective listening" to summarize the other person's message. Restate both the content and the emotions communicated.

- Praise others for sharing. Show them you appreciate knowing their thoughts and feelings.
- When speaking, be assertive. State what you want and how you feel.
- Speak with purpose. Be clear about your goals.
- Ask for feedback from those to whom you are speaking to ensure that you are being understood.

#### **... about Closeness:**

- Make relationships a priority. Pay attention to peoples' needs, be a good listener, and give appropriate support.
- Share your personal feelings. Tell others how you feel, let them know you trust them.
- Find quality time with others. Even work can offer time for fun and time to get to know others on a deeper level.
- Focus on positives and give praise. Give compliments and concentrate on what you like about the other person.
- Focus on future goals. Emphasize mutual objectives you can work on together.

#### **... about Flexibility:**

- Be open to diverse ideas. This will increase your understanding and appreciation of other people's points of view.
- Brainstorm ideas without judging. Make a list of various solutions without evaluating their merit.
- Avoid judging "right" or "wrong". Increase your flexibility with others; ask for their help and value their input – whether or not you choose to use their ideas.
- "Try on" other people's roles. Understand another person's position. This builds flexibility into your relationships.

Make managing your stress a priority... it's the healthy thing to do... and you should do it for you.

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