

## BUST STRESS IN 5 STEPS

Do you ever feel like your calendar is running you instead of the other way around? Ever get agitated due to too many competing priorities and super-tight deadlines but not enough time? Or have restless nights thinking about your version of the TPS report? (Gotta love “Office Space!”) If you’ve answered “yes” to any of these questions, you are living with stress.

### **Bust stress in five steps**

These 5 steps give you a simple framework you can easily adapt.

#### **1) Set a positive tone for your day**

Upon awakening, keep your eyes closed. Pay attention to your breath for a few minutes and without changing it, recognize the depth, length and location of it. If your mind starts making lists and writing emails in your head, take a deep breath. Think of something positive, something that you desire or makes you happy, and visualize the effects of it coming true. If you have a meditation practice, slip into it. If not, just stick with your breath or visualization.

#### **2) Listen to your body**

Take a slow mental scan of your body. Watch what comes up. You might experience extreme joy or some cringing in your body or a sudden burst of anger toward a particular individual. If the latter happens, acknowledge it and focus your energy on what you can regulate: your own reaction. Give them the benefit of the doubt that, just like you, every day they try to make the best choices based on their own journey. It will help you see them differently. It will help you see them with compassion and through the lens of an independent observer. I saw a quote circling on social media a while ago with the #speaklife hash tag that said, “Be kind. For everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.” So true.

#### **3) Use tools**

The most fundamental tool at your disposal is your breath. You can learn to calm yourself down by taking deep and slow breaths into the belly. Place one hand on your belly. Inhale through your nose as you draw the air into your abdomen for a count of four, feeling your belly bulge. Consider pausing for one or two breaths at the top of your inhalation, and count again to four as you exhale through your nose, feeling your naval moving towards your spine. Do not constrict your throat. You can increase the count as you become comfortable with this technique.

Other tools include exercise, yoga, meditation, prioritization and lifestyle management. Lifestyle should also include laughing (a lot), and having a “thing,” a hobby outside of work.

#### **4) Pause and reset**

Here are four ways to quickly course correct and hit that reset button:

- **Take bathroom breaks:** Any time you feel stress, anger or anxiety coming

- on, take a few minutes of silence in the bathroom and breathe into your belly.
- **Be alone for 15 minutes:** Block your calendar during lunchtime. Enjoy 15 minutes in silence in a hidden corner of your building, in your car or walking. No emails, no texts, no calls.
  - **Create space between work and home:** Start with spending a few minutes in your car in silence before leaving work. Even if you need to (continue to) work when you are at home, bring your workday to a close. Do a few rounds of belly breaths, gaze at an object, take a warm bath or find something that makes you happy to let your day go.
  - **Give thanks:** Acknowledge the people and things in your life you're thankful for. Every day.

## 5) Pace Yourself

Start small. After all, there's no point in stressing about stress. Try one or two things from the above list for six to eight weeks. Stick with the changes and when you're ready, add in another one, and so on.

Slipping up is part of the process so don't be hard on yourself. Acknowledge it without judgment and let it go. Then try again.