

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

# Keeping Your Balance

## Keys to Surviving Stress at Work

Hey brother! Have you been downsized, reorganized, re-engineered, and restructured? Are you being asked to make more widgets than ever before with fewer labor hours and no capital to upgrade your plant? Are you being asked to sell more widgets with fewer salespeople and less marketing money while improving your customer service scores? You are? Welcome to business in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. You ain't seen nothing yet!

Change is upon us folks and the pace of change is increasing logarithmically. The one certain thing that change brings is stress. The more change, the more stress. There are three kinds of people when it comes to dealing with stress. There are those that love it, the more the better. There are those that deal with it, a certain amount keeps them motivated and focused. And there are those that don't want any, they run from it as fast as their legs will carry them.

Most of us fall into the second group; we deal with it. The stress in our lives is actually good for us, it keeps us motivated and focused. It keeps us working towards our goals. Without this stress we would soon be bored. Too much stress however, can cause us to get downright cranky. Prolong this high level of stress and we lose productivity, and relationships at work and at home suffer. People who have suffered under too much stress for long periods are often referred to as "burnouts."

If change brings stress, and the pace of change is increasing, then it stands to reason that we had better figure out how to deal with stress effectively or we'll end up in corporate scrap heaps for sure.

### SOURCES OF JOB STRESS

Andrew Goliszek, in his book *Breaking The Stress Habit* writes, "Just about any work situation we're involved in can be a potential source of stress. The way in which we perceive those work situations will determine to what extent we're stressed and whether or not we'll experience serious stress symptoms. Our response to stress is either negative or positive depending on how

*(Continued on page 2)*

Words to Ponder 4  
*A selection of Bible verses and wise sayings for the executive under stress*

Getting Started 5  
*Six steps you can take to reduce your on the job stress*

One Final Thought 5  
*Something to consider as you venture forth next week*

Cases in Real Life 6  
*A real life case from the files of an executive*

Meeting Notes 7  
*Identifying and dealing with workplace stressors*

Stressbusters 8  
*18 things you can do to reduce stress*

## Keeping Your Balance

(Continued from page 1)

we elect to perceive and interpret that stress and how we ultimately choose to deal with it.”

Before we can deal with stress on the job or at home, we need to understand where the stress is coming from. Goliszek identifies the top ten job stress producers:

- 1) *Not being organized or able to manage time effectively.*
- 2) *Having conflicts with supervisors, workers, or colleagues.*
- 3) *Not being able or qualified to do the job.*
- 4) *Feeling overwhelmed or overburdened by work.*
- 5) *Having too much or too little responsibility.*
- 6) *Not being able to meet deadlines.*
- 7) *Not being able to adapt to changes in work routine.*
- 8) *Not being able to utilize our*

*skills and abilities.*

9) *Feeling that work is boring and meaningless.*

10) *Not getting any support from supervisors and managers.*

There are many other job stressors but these are the most common.

Stress has a habit of multiplying. You have an argument at home so you get to the office cranky. Something goes wrong at the office and nothing goes right the rest of the day. You lose your focus and what would normally be easy work to complete suddenly seems impossibly complex.

Stress is also a very personal thing. What is stressful for one person is not for another. What can motivate one person can bring another to their knees. People also react to stress differently at different times.

What may not bother you at all today may turn you into a blithering idiot tomorrow.

### STRESS SYMPTOMS

There are dozens of stress symptoms. They are usually divided into three categories; physical, emotional, and behavioral. The chart on the next page lists some of the more common symptoms of stress.

As you can see it is very easy to mistake stress symptoms for something else. People who are tired at the end of the day may think it is their diet or a lack of sleep that gets them down when it may actually be a sign of excess stress.

Someone who starts forgetting things or gets confused might think it is just a sign of their advancing years and never think of all the stress that has entered their lives.

### MOSES AND STRESS

Some people assume that if you are a good Christian then you won't be troubled by stress; everything will roll off your back like water off of a duck. Nothing could be further from the truth! The Bible describes dozens of people under stress but Moses is one of my favorites.

Moses is leading the nation Israel out of Egypt into the promised land. Imagine being in charge of 2,000,000 people on a march through the desert!

(Continued on page 3)

## Publishing Information

The *Wheat & chaff* Newsletter is published by *Wheat & chaff*. The Newsletter is designed to provide Biblical insights to relevant business issues for today's managers.

**Editor:** Ron R. Kelleher. Ron completed a 36-year career in sales and marketing management for a top Fortune 50 company, before retiring to spend full-time in ministry to

the business community.

**Questions:** If there is a specific question or subject you would like to see addressed in a future issue please email [editor@wheat-chaff.org](mailto:editor@wheat-chaff.org).

**Quotations:** Unless otherwise noted all Bible verses are from the New International Version.

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## Keeping Your Balance

*(Continued from page 2)*

Despite all the things God had done to take care of His people it wasn't long before they were whining about their diet and all the hardships they had to endure. Moses bore the burden as long as he could but he finally went to God, *"Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."* (Numbers 11:11-15 NIV).

Can't you almost hear Moses, "Lord, I didn't ask for this job. Why are you doing this to me? I don't even like these people! Don't you like me Lord? I'd rather die than keep listening to these whining people!" Talk about stress!

Fortunately for Moses he had a smart father-in-law, Jethro. Jethro saw that all 2,000,000 who had problems could come to

Moses for answers. Moses sat all day long listening to every little dispute among the people. That is certainly a recipe for stress! Jethro told Moses, *"What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone."* (Exodus 18:17 - 18 NIV).

Jethro hit Moses right in the face; "You're going to kill yourself if you keep this up!" Jethro continued, *"Listen now to me and I will give you some advice and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable*

*men from all the people—men who fear God, trust worthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."* (Exodus 18:19-23 NIV).

Notice Jethro's advice about the people Moses was to appoint. He identified five important characteristics for these assistants: able men who fear God,

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Common Symptoms of Stress

### PHYSICAL

Headaches, Backaches, Muscle tension, Fatigue, Pounding heart, Insomnia, Upset stomach, Low energy, Digestive problems, Restlessness, Nightmares, Weight gain/loss, Hair loss/thinning, Irregular periods, Neck pain, Dry mouth.

### EMOTIONAL

Anxiety, Excessive irritability, Quick temper, Sudden mood swings, Crying spells, Self-doubt, Difficulty concentrating, Memory loss, Forgetfulness, Confusion, Stagnation of ideas,

Negative self-talk, Excessive worry, Poor time management, Unclear planning, Disorganized thinking.

### BEHAVIORAL

Accident prone, Excessive use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, Foot tapping, Nervous laugh, Jaw clenching, Change in sex drive, Nail biting, Pacing the floor, Chronic procrastination, Compulsive eating, Compulsive dieting, Chronic tardiness, Grinding teeth, Change in social, habits.

## Keeping Your balance

*(Continued from page 3)*

men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain, men who are leaders, and men who are discerning enough to judge.

One of the biggest reasons we have stress is we don't utilize our resources well. Moses had lots of talented people capable of helping in the work but he wasn't utilizing them. He hadn't learned how to say "No," the importance of training others, or how to delegate. Does this sound like your story?

### OVERCOMING STRESS

We have already discussed stress is often a matter of perception. How can we keep our perspective so that we minimize the effect of stress in our lives?

Proverbs 3:5-8 provides some insight, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on*

*understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.*"

Notice the steps involved in these verses. First, we are instructed to trust in the Lord with all our hearts. That's complete trust. It doesn't mean you'll trust God with the little things, it means everything!

Second, we are not to lean on our own understanding. How many times have you thought God wasn't acting fast enough so you took matters into your own hands?

Third, in all ways we are to acknowledge God. That means we are to recognize God in everything. God is *never* apart from us.

These are three action steps that we must take. When we do God will make straight our paths.

Step four is to not get cocky, thinking that we are wise and can handle everything.

Fifth, we are to shun evil. Avoid evil, or even the appearance of evil. In other words, don't compromise your integrity.

These five action steps are our part. We are to trust in God, not lean on our own understanding, acknowledge God in all things, not think we are too wise to need God, and avoid all forms of evil.

If we do our part, God's promises are that He will make our paths straight, and bring health to our bodies. If it's true that stress results in many of our physical maladies then removing stress through God's promises will surely bring about healthier physical, emotional, and spiritual people!

## Words to Ponder

*How much have cost us the evils that never happened. Benjamin Franklin*

*One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. (Josh 23:10 NIV)*

*But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. (Ps 3:3 NIV)*

*God never built a Christian strong enough to carry today's duties and*

*tomorrow's anxieties piled on top of them. Theodore Cuyler*

*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Ps 73:26 NIV)*

*When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. (Prov 3:24 NIV)*

*He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge. (Prov 14:26 NIV)*

## Getting Started

Would you like to manage the stress in your life better? Here are six steps you can take beginning today!

### IDENTIFY

Get some paper and down the left side write the following: 1) Frustrate you, 2) Bore you, 3) Wear you out, 4) Worry you, 5) Depress you, 6) Irritate you, and 7) Anger you. Across the top make four columns and label them; At work, At home, Personal Relationships, and Other. Make a grid of the columns and rows. Now write down the activities conditions, people, or places that cause you stress in the appropriate row and column. For example, rework at the office frustrates you, or you worry about not keeping up at work. Keep going until you've listed all the stressors in your life.

### EVALUATE

Consider each of the blocks on your personal stressor form. Number the one that causes the most stress "1," the next most

stress "2," and so on, until all the blocks are ranked.

### DETERMINE

There are four common ways to deal with individual stressors (see the chart on page 7 for examples):

- *Accept. Know what you can change and what you can't. Learn to accept things you can not change.*
- *Alter. Change the stressor so that it is easier to deal with.*
- *Avoid. Eliminate stressful situations whenever possible.*
- *Build your resistance. For situations that you know you will have to face learn to prepare yourself mentally and physically to cope with the stress.*

Determine which of the four options will help take care of your number "1" stressor, then number "2," and so on.

### PLAN

Develop an idea or a plan on how you will get started with stressor

"1." Include in your plan people and resources you will need. Move on to stressor "2." Write the plan down so you can refer to it later. The 80/20 rule usually applies to stress. If you address 20% of your stressors you've probably dealt with 80% of your stress.

### ACTION

Put your plan into action. Knowing where your stress comes from is nice, figuring out what to do about it is better, but nothing will feel as good as taking action.

### COMMIT

Commit your life and your plan to deal with stress to Christ. Remember, *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."* (Isa 43:1-2 NIV).

## One Final Thought

We like to think that we are impervious super-men and women capable of leaping tall buildings in a single bound. But the truth is we are really pretty frail. In fact, our drive to make everything perfect, to have everything we want, and provide every advantage to our children is our greatest frailty.

This drive to have everything and live a perfect life sets us up for disappointment. We are so focused on ourselves, that we

have trouble seeing God in our lives. We go to church on Sunday and know that He is in control, but then before we even get out of the church parking lot we are trying to take over again. How dare those people cross the road in front of us! Don't they know we've got to get to brunch? And hey! What about this idiot driving in front of us, is it possible he can go any slower?

Consider these two verses from John, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."* *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* (John 14:1, 27 NIV).

Do you want to get rid of unwanted stress? Trust in God, do not be afraid, and He will give you peace. What can be better than that?

## Cases in Real Life

“John,” a middle-aged middle manager in a large international company, hears rumors about poor financial results in his division. He begins to worry about cutbacks and his job security. As the rumors spread his employees begin coming to him with concerns about their job security. Within a few months corporate announcements of major restructuring are made, but no details.

John makes it through the restructuring with his same basic job but he now has not one but two new bosses. It’s called “matrix management.”

Upper management has made it clear that the company intends to increase the rate of product introductions. John worries about his ability to keep up with the pace of the business, and this again causes him to worry about his job security.

John has become so obsessed with job security that he can think of little else. He is less efficient with his own work and his attitude is starting to show around his employees.

Within weeks the impressionable employees are scared to death about their job security and John’s business begins to suffer because of decreased efficiency. As the business suffers he has real cause to worry about his job security.

### REDUCING THE STRESS

John is suffering from “burnout” and is well on his way to causing burnout among employees. What could John have done to handle these stressors more effectively for himself and his organization?

Reading even this short description about John you know he’s been under unusual stress and he is infecting his organization. Amazingly, John didn’t recognize this workplace stress, and certainly didn’t think he was contributing to his

employee’s stress levels. Often people are too close to a situation to realize that they are being affected until it is almost too late.

#### **Key Learning #1.**

Realize that people who work for you may be feeling more stress than usual. Study the symptoms chart on page 3 and be alert to signs of stress in your employees.

#### **Key Learning #2.**

While you’re reviewing the stress symptom chart think about yourself. Examine your life closely. Ask your spouse or a trusted friend for some feedback.

#### **Key Learning #3.**

If you are a boss under stress chances are very good that your employees have noticed changes in your personality or work habits. If you’ve been under stress for a while you can expect that employees have begun to feel the same kind of stress you’re feeling. Stress is very difficult to contain in a single layer of management.

#### **Key Learning #4.**

Short term stress may increase productivity as John works to complete an important project. But the prolonged stress resulting from concerns about cutbacks and job security reduce productivity first in the manager, then in the organization.

#### **Key Learning #5.**

Stress is often caused by rumor. If you’re going to worry and get stressed-out why not focus on what you know as fact rather than on what is rumor?

As a manager you can do a lot to reduce organizational stress simply by over-communicating facts and doing everything you can to squelch rumors.

#### **Key Learning #6.**

Much stress is simply unnecessary. A recent survey indicated that 90% of the things people worry about never come to pass.

#### **Key Learning #7.**

Stress does not go away until something changes. Either the situation that causes the stress changes, or you decide to change the way you manage the stress.

Learn first how to identify the stressors in your life. Once you know where your stress comes from focus on the things that cause the most stress and then do something about them.

As hard as it might be to do, John should have refused to speculate about the cutback rumors and focused instead on how he and his organization could be as productive as possible.

If John’s job skills were becoming outdated, rather than worry about it he should have done something about correcting the deficiency; take a class, go to a seminar, read business publications, etc.

John should have done everything he could to reduce stress in his workforce. Most employers ignore stress and employee burnout until they are faced with poor performance and increased turnover rates. But by then it’s too late, the organization has already been damaged.

## Common Symptoms of Stress

Use these meeting notes to guide a self-analysis of work place stressors. Allow at least an hour for participants to get started on their stressors list. Repeat this process annually. Employees should keep their work to refer to on a regular basis.

- 1) Have people list activities/conditions/people/places that frustrate you, bore you, wear you out, worry you, depress you, irritate you, or anger you at work.
- 2) For each of the stressors listed above write down how you plan to deal with it; accept, alter, avoid, or build your resistance.
- 3) Rank the stressors listed in step 2 with "1" being the stressor that bothers you the most.
- 4) Reviewing the techniques below write down how you will deal with each stressor. You may want to reproduce the chart below on a larger chart or overhead for everyone to refer to.
- 5) Now just do it! Understanding your stressors is good, figuring out how to deal with them is great, but nothing substitutes for actually doing something about the stressors in your life!

Acceptance	Alter the stressor	Avoid stressor	Build your resistance
Ease stress by changing your reaction to it:	Change the stressor so that it is easier to cope with:	Eliminate stressful situations:	Prepare yourself mentally and physically to cope with stress:
Practice having a positive attitude Laugh. Take yourself less seriously Keep things in perspective Recognize uncontrollable situations Build your confidence	Practice time management skills Alter the physical environment Delegate Problem solve	Delegate when possible Plan ahead Plan realistically Have a contingency plan Practice assertiveness Take periodic breaks and vacations	Develop support systems with family and friends Practice relaxation Develop good nutritional habits Exercise vigorously and regularly (with doctor's permission) Deepen your spiritual beliefs

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**Biblical Insights for  
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Primary Business Address:  
23372 Via Chiripa  
Mission Viejo, CA 92691-2216

Phone: 949.472.0107  
Fax: 949.472.0820  
E-mail: [editor@wheat-chaff.org](mailto:editor@wheat-chaff.org)

We're on the web:  
[Wheat-chaff.org](http://Wheat-chaff.org)

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**Newsletter**

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS FOR TODAY'S MANAGERS

## Stress Busters:

The following are adapted from a 18-point plan created by Dr. Martin Brenner, medical director at the CPC Santa Ana Hospital:

- Smile: Do it as often as possible. Be tolerant of others.
- Slow down: allow time to yourself, drive leisurely, walk, wait, etc.
- Self-acceptance: "I am what I am." Stress can't be eliminated.
- Leisure: Reserve daily quality time to include family, friends, hobbies, and being alone.
- Relaxation: Get away several times each day for a few moments to relax.
- Vacation: At least every three months.
- Share concerns and fears with others. Practice asking for help and delegating.
- Alcohol: Not to exceed 8 ounces of wine or equivalent per day. Preferably none.
- Drugs: None.
- Smoking: None.
- Exercise: Three times per week, half-hour minimum.
- Scheduling: Plan work and fun time realistically so it can be enjoyed.
- Goals: Set realistic goals for personal and life work.
- Assertiveness: Learn how to say "No."
- Flexibility: Learn how to bend your schedule.
- Diet: Balanced, Nutritious.
- Sleep: As needed, usually 7-8 hours.
- Faith: memorize scripture promises about God's protective hand in our time of need.

