

## **Part 5 – Creating your own stress management strategy**

Combatting stress is a critical skill for everyone in the working world, but it is not easy for any of us! Most of us resort to comfort eating, we stop exercising, start smoking, sleep less/more or drink too much, all in an attempt to soothe our own discomfort. All of these behaviours in turn add more stress to an already tired and unhappy body.

There are really no hard and fast rules, each individual needs to find their own strategy to combat stress in their daily lives.

The following however are the common denominators for all of us:

1. *Eating correctly*
2. *Exercising*
3. *Getting enough sleep*
4. *Being more organized*
5. *Better preparation and planning*
- 6 *Good backup/contingency preparations*

If you pay attention to the six items above you will greatly reduce the impact of stress, maybe not the actual stress itself but the effects on your body and mind.

One of the most powerful weapons to combat stress is your mind, the way you perceive the stress and the creative ways you can find to reduce or completely eliminate some of your stress. This cannot be achieved while you are in a victim mentality or completely deprived of sleep. So the first and most important work that needs to be done is to focus on your inner voice. What are you telling yourself and others about the situation? It is natural and very easy to feel negative but this only breeds more negativity, stress, poor sleep and lack of energy.

The next most critical task is to unpack the things that cause stress for you. List them and really think about solutions and if there are no immediate solutions create coping strategies. For example: Traffic is a daily struggle for many of us, it creates a ridiculous amount of stress and agitation, most of the time there is not much you can do about it, but using the time to listen to an audio book or your favourite CD can make the time more productive or at least a bit happier. Telling yourself that getting angry or irritated will only increase your stress, breathing deeply and trying to accept it is a much smarter and less stressful way to deal with this daily annoyance. This is a small example but you can apply this **reframing** to almost any situation. Try it, it really works!

The next critical item is **self-care**. You may have little rituals in your day that make life a little easier. That first cup of coffee of the day, a nice bubble bath, walking your dog or perhaps playing with your children.

Find and cherish those little things that give you joy! They are critical to prevent you getting run down by the daily grind.

Develop interests and **hobbies** outside of your career. Take time to play and relax. For many PAs a normal day revolves around the needs and wants of others, endless tasks and to do lists, difficult or high maintenance personalities and then for most, also a full home life and a family that needs you. *The essential thing to realize is that if you are completely and utterly stressed out and tired, no one benefits.*

Sometimes taking some time out may feel selfish or as if you cannot afford to waste the time, but please realize that time spent **recharging** is not wasted and when you get back to the tasks on your table you will be better equipped to take them on and give your best.

**Be kinder to yourself.** As much as the myth is spread and the folklore is told and retold, PAs are not super beings who can cope with an unlimited amount of problem, demands and stress. **It is ok to not be ok!**

We also need to **start supporting** one another more and judging less. Be there for someone who is going through a rough patch; assist a fellow PA with a big project if you can. Good Karma will come back to you one day when you need it most!

Most importantly, **don't go it alone!** If your stress is out of control get professional help, there is no shame in getting to grips with your issues, in fact it is the only smart thing to do! Remember that there are people in your life who care about you and your well-being (for me in times of extreme stress it is a quick call to my mother.) Who is that person who is there for you and can offer you comfort and more importantly who you can provide with comfort in turn.

Dealing with stress should be a priority not something you will get around to when you have less stress, so take charge and start defining and implementing your personalized stress management strategy today! After all your body, mind, boss, team and family will thank you!