

Entrepreneurial Stress - and How to Cope

There's no escaping stress. It's everywhere. And evidence is accumulating that much of all illnesses -- ulcers, spastic colons, and even certain cancers -- occur because of excessive stress.

But stress in and of itself isn't bad. It's how much of it we have to deal with and how we handle it that determines whether it is damaging.

Small business owners are especially vulnerable to stress because they tend to be driven, intense, and unwilling to tolerate failure. Moreover, they often forgo family support and feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities. As if all those factors aren't enough, many entrepreneurs experience extraordinary guilt and other forms of conflict over their intense drive toward success.

From a physical perspective, stress stimulates the body to produce adrenaline. Excessive stress causes excessive stimulation of adrenaline, which in turn can lead to high blood pressure and damage the cardio-vascular system. Excessive stress can also create depression, psychosomatic symptoms like back pain and insomnia, and drug or alcohol dependency.

Based on the amount of stress you are experiencing, there are steps you can take to ease its effects.

- ✓ **Work at putting off worrying.** Certainly easier said than done. But the ability to postpone worrying about a situation to a more appropriate time has been shown in research to be a key factor for those who were able to cope with stressful situations. Regular meditation, yoga or simple breathing exercises can help in making such an adjustment.
- ✓ **Plan your life more carefully.** Using a calendar and daily planner can provide greater

control over your time. Making a daily list of things to do and prioritizing them can help reduce the stress associated with feeling overwhelmed.

- ✓ **Exercise regularly.** It should become a part of your life. Even a simple 2 minute walk during a lunch break can not only greatly reduce stress, but you'll feel rejuvenated for the afternoon. Just remember to be reasonable in your approach, because it's easy to try to do too much too soon and develop injuries.
- ✓ **Eat right.** Avoid sugar, salt, and caffeine. These play havoc with your body and result in energy and mood swings. Make sure you keep healthy foods accessible so you're not tempted to reach for the sweets.
- ✓ **Learn to delegate and prioritize.** If there's no one to delegate to, ask yourself whether that task is really necessary or would just be nice to do. By taking the pressure off yourself to accomplish all important tasks, you can relieve stress.
- ✓ **Consider stress-reduction techniques.** These include such approaches as biofeedback, self-hypnosis, and meditation.
- ✓ **Go easy on yourself.** Personal insecurity is often a driving force for workaholics and overachievers. Such insecurity together with societal demands can create tremendous pressure and stress.

In short, try to keep your life and your real needs in perspective.

Here are a few inspirational and motivational books worth checking out.

Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude by Napoleon Hill and W. Clement Stone (Pocket Books)

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Richard Covey (Simon & Schuster)

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (multiple publishers)

The Power of Positive Thinking by Norman Vincent Peale (Prentice-Hall)

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