

Productivity and Stress Management: Paper at Home, People at the Club

Boy, am I stressed out.....

The club business gives each of us plenty of opportunities to experience the joys and the sorrows of stress. The sorrows are easy enough to find---the variance analysis for the month needs to get out to the Finance Committee but the Controller eloped with the Maitre d' and the Controller's Assistant is crying over a rude comment from the Chef about a payroll error that's been repeated a few time too often. Your stomach is in knots, your palms are sweating, you sense an acrid smell about your person and you can't speak without commiserating with yourself over the dilemma. Ugh---stress was your worst enemy and you feel like tossing yourself into the nearest closet for two weeks of solitude.

On the other hand, you've also experienced the exhilaration and incredible productivity that can accompany stress. You've reviewed your "State of the Club" speech for the annual meeting seven times, you're trying to remember bad jokes to open the session and you're convinced you can't remember the big issues you're going to address. The moment arrives, you stride to the podium with more confidence than you feel, and suddenly you launch into the presentation with no reference whatsoever to the notes you so scrupulously created and studied. You're animated, enthused, personable, confident, knowledgeable---goodness, you actually sound and act like the General Manager you are!!! Yow---Stress was your best friend and you feel like a "small g" god because of it.

Stress is like an animal. Stress can growl at you, scare you to death, dissipate your energies as you fend off attacks, then bite you in seven different places before tossing you about and into the trash heap of history. Or stress can be a workhorse, concentrating all your energies on the moment and the load, giving you big shoulders and helping you become the hero or the heroine you imagine yourself to be.

Stress is the chemical, physical, psychological and emotional response that occurs when needs, wants, expectations and demands exceed anticipated results. Whew---in short, stress has to do with expectations and the success or failure in equaling those expectations. It's a big issue, intended by our biological and genetic forefathers to help us survive in a competitive and sometimes nasty world. Typically called the "Fight or flight response" in the animal kingdom, we experience "stressors" each day that make life a brilliant and glowing experience or a gloomy and morbid slog.

How to make stress your friend, your own Budweiser Clydesdale, rather than a wild and rabid junkyard dog, is what this article is about. It's a big subject with a big impact on your personal and professional success. Here's an alternative you might want to consider as part of your "stress management package."

Paper at home, people at the club...huh???

Imagine this. You're in your office--- curtains drawn, phone on "Do Not Disturb," staff warned, door closed, silence from within. You're bent over your computer trying to draft the President's message to the membership advising them of a \$27,500 assessment that the Board approved last evening. Everyone knows that you're her "ghost writer" since she flew out of the country after the Board meeting on a three month surfing holiday in the Maldives. Every word is important. You're deep into it when, you hear a whisper. "Gregg? Gregg? I know you're on "Do Not Disturb" but I really need to show you these photos of me winning the bridge championship in Gestaad two weeks ago. Sorry-----" And, like the good manager you are, you stop, get up, talk for twenty minutes about duplicate bridge, then return to your computer, the screen saver blinking back at you with the message "Have a nice day." Stress builds as you return to the letter, anticipating the next knock, the next "Yoo-hoo, Gregg....."

Ignore what the "Ninety Hour a Week Guys" say about "I gotta be there" or the club won't run, the staff will mutiny and the Board's spies will turn you in for laziness. Fact is that true productivity and real stress reduction arise when you seriously confront the truth behind the hours invested---there is a time and a place for everything. Jumble too many things together and you lower productivity, reduce "people connectivity" and amplify the stress quotient in your professional life.

The solution? Do your paperwork outside of the club and focus on people---telephone calls, e-mails, interviews, walk-and-talks--- at the club. **People at home, people at the club.** When you're working on paper, focus and enjoy. When you're talking, throw everything you've got into it and charm them with your passion and erudition.

How do you make this work? How do you chase away the "I've Gotta Be There" demons that infect the recesses of your brain? First of all, create an office sanctuary at home filled with all the computers, telephones and fax machines you need to stay connected. Have a problem with screaming kids or nosey spouse? No problem, simply find a cheapo office your club will pay for and fill it with the "stay connected and productive" machinery you need. Then you need a routine---take that briefcase filled with paper home with you each night, get a great night's sleep, do your early morning exercise, brew an aggressive cup of caffeine, read that novel for twenty minutes to get the creative juices flowing, then sit down and begin chewing through the paper, the reports you need to write and the analyses you need to conduct, all the while comforted by the thought that no-one will bust into the room, ask you about the egg options on the brunch menu this coming Sunday then sit there for twenty minutes discussing the ozone hole while eating the free chocolates in the "Welcome Jar" on your desk. I guarantee that doing this will wash away the stress and allow you to get eight hours of work done in three. And you'll once again find that you truly love the analytical and the contemplative in the club business.

What about The Board, what about the membership, what about The Management Team, what about The Staff and what about your own sense of guilt---what will they and what should you think of your absence? This one's easy. The members won't miss you because they "ain't even there yet." Arrive at 11:30, excited and refreshed by the uninterrupted productivity you've experienced, hit the luncheon crowd and wow them with the depth of your thoughts and the extent of your enthusiasm. You've got a good seven or eight hours of "Walk and Talk," "Sit and Listen" and "Hello, Gregg Speaking" to connect with the membership. Same goes for the staff---when you arrive there will be lightening bolts surging from your fingers and you'll have the rest of the day to concentrate on meetings and one-on-one communications. No worries about the report to be done, no concern that a casual conversation now will mean an extra hour of writing when you're burned out at the end of the day. The Management Team will love it since they will be "The Big Cheeses" during your morning's absence and they know that they'll get your full attention during your "Upbrief" when you arrive and your "Debrief" when you exit at the end of the day. And the Board will buy into it since they'll know they can connect with you at the home office each morning, that they'll get through immediately and that you can focus on "Big Picture Issues" without of the day to day

clutter that occupies any executive in their office. You'll be a presence without the clutter of being in the office.

How will they know your routine, when to call and not, when to expect you in the clubhouse itself, physically on sight? As with all stress related problems, the solution is in your hands. You're responsible (presumably!) for orienting the new Board, new staff, supervisors and managers and part of that responsibility is orienting them to you and the routines that have made you a truly effective executive. Then you remind the Board of your routine in "The Board Update" which you write and ship out to them each week. (Another great "stress reduction technique" which deserves its own article at some point in the future!) Besides, each of the Board members and each of the management team are busy business people and I guarantee that they'll think the "Paper at Home, People in the Office" is about the smartest way to reduce stress and increase productivity that they've heard in the last decade or two.

Always remember----it is your responsibility to orient and to educate your staff, management team, Board and membership to the virtues of "Paper at Home, People at the Club." Leadership is about vision and stress management requires a "vision statement" from you to your club community. Bringing them "on board" will do wonders to the guilt complex you'll feel by not being on-site and present "24 / 7."

Time to Get Started:

This stress technique and formula for productivity costs nothing and offers an enormous return to you, your family, the management team and your club. Start small and build up to the "full-bore" program. Float the idea in staff meetings and The Update, come in a little later, make sure your Administrative Assistant gets a pile of paper from your home office to distribute each time you arrive. Convince your President of the merits, educate the Board, give the members more zings each time they connect with you at the club. Get over your guilty conscience ("I feel so bad if I'm not there when the club is open---") and enjoy a less stressful, far more productive and entirely more satisfying club experience by becoming a disciple of the "Paper at Home, People at the Club" stress management philosophy.