

The American Institute of Stress

CONTENTMENT

Your source for science-based stress management information

Volume 9 Number 4

Winter 2020/2021

An aerial photograph of a person standing on a large, flat, white rock in a field of smaller, dark rocks. The person is wearing a dark jacket, dark pants, and a green beanie. They are holding a small object in their hands. The overall scene is a mix of white and dark tones, creating a high-contrast, textured environment.

Transforming Chaos to Contentment

Inside: **Personal Leader Transformation in a Post Trauma World**, Charlie Grantham • **The Loneliness Crisis**, Cynthia Howard
• **How to Thrive in a Crisis**, Dennis Morris • **Finding the Light Within the Darkness of Winter**, Jen Butler
• **Ten Essential Things You Need to Know to Meditate**, James Porter
• **What if Your Relationships Felt as Graceful as Fred and Ginger?** Maureen McCarthy



The mission of AIS is to improve the health of the community and the world by setting the standard of excellence of stress management in education, research, clinical care and the workplace. Diverse and inclusive, The American Institute of Stress educates medical practitioners, scientists, health care professionals and the public; conducts research; and provides information, training and techniques to prevent human illness related to stress.

AIS provides a diverse and inclusive environment that fosters intellectual discovery, creates and transmits innovative knowledge, improves human health, and provides leadership to the world on stress related topics.

Your source for science-based stress management information

CONTENTMENT

We value opinions of our readers.

Contentment is a quarterly magazine published in Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter with news and advertising designed with the general public in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between stress and health because technical jargon is avoided and it is easy to understand. *Contentment* magazine is indexed by EBSCO and archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

Editor In Chief:

Daniel L. Kirsch, PhD, FAIS

Managing Editor:

Kathy Schoop

Editor:

Cynthia Ackrill, MD, PCC, FAIS

Creative Director:

Michael McMahon

AIS Daily Life Stress Board

The role of this board is to develop initiatives and communications to serve the stress management needs of all people.

Cynthia Ackrill, MD, PCC, FAIS

Heidi Hanna, PhD, FAIS

David Sollars, MAc, LAc, HMC, DAIS

Daniel L. Kirsch, PhD, FAIS

William C. Heckman, MS, DAIS

Please feel free to contact us with any comments, suggestions or inquiries. Email: editor@stress.org

Copyright© 2020 the American Institute of Stress (AIS). All rights reserved. All materials on AIS' website and in AIS' newsletters are the property of AIS and may not be copied, reproduced, sold, or distributed without permission. For permission, contact editor@stress.org. Liberal use of AIS fact sheets and news releases is allowable with attribution. Please use the following: "Reproduced from the American Institute of Stress website [or magazine], © AIS 2020"

Contributing Editors Board

Cynthia Howard, RN, CNC, PhD, FAIS

Richard Citrin, PhD, MBA

Lee Bougie, MS

Alex Bekker, MD, ABHIM, FAIS

Teena Evert, MA

Rozina Lakhani, MD, MPH

Ron Rubenzer, EdD, MA, MPH, MSE, FAIS

James C. Petersen, PhD, FAIS



The American Institute of Stress

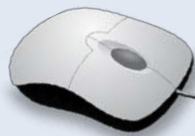
Stress Management Experts Wanted!

Obtaining credentials from The American Institute of Stress is a designation that sets members apart as stress experts and reflects their commitment to the advancement of innovative and scientifically based stress management protocols. The AIS Seal and credentials inform the public that the certificate holder commands advanced knowledge of the latest stress research and stress management techniques. For physicians and other healthcare practitioners, it designates your practice as an advanced treatment center for stress-related illnesses.

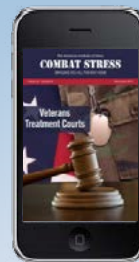


	Member	Diplomate	Fellow
Features Save 20% on years 2 and 3 with our 3 year plan	\$95 per year or \$247 for 3 years	\$395 per year or \$1,027 for 3 years	\$495 per year or \$1,287 for 3 years
Requirements	Open to everyone	Hold a degree or healthcare license and have been in practice or profession for 3 years	Hold a doctorate degree or special license and have been in practice or profession for 5 years
Collaboration with International Professional Community	✓	✓	✓
Continuing education training programs		✓	✓
Subscription to quarterly magazine Contentment and Combat Stress	✓	✓	✓
Membership certificate	✓	✓ + use of DAIS designation	✓ + use of FAIS designation
Quarterly Research Roundup publication		✓	✓
Opportunity to join Speakers Bureau		✓	✓
Discount on annual online conference		✓	✓
Access to AIS research archives		✓	✓
Media spokesperson opportunities		✓	✓
Opportunity to contribute to magazines, blogs, and social media		✓	✓
FREE: Hans Selye and the Origin of AIS ebook	✓	✓	✓
FREE: The Body Electric, a documentary movie produced by AIS	✓	✓	✓

**Sign up for
membership today
at stress.org**



**Enjoy exclusive AIS features and articles online,
or on your smartphone or tablet.**



Subscribe today and begin receiving your copy of Contentment and Combat Stress in your inbox each quarter.

The American Institute of Stress is a 501c3 non-profit organization, headquartered in Weatherford, Texas. We serve the global community through both online and in-person programs and classes. The Institute is dedicated to advancing understanding of the role of stress in health and illness, the nature and importance of mind/body relationships and how to use our vast innate potential for self-healing. Our paramount goal at the AIS is to provide a clearinghouse of stress related information to the general public, physicians, health professionals and lay individuals interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life.

The American Institute of Stress
220 Adams Drive, Suite 280 - #224, Weatherford, TX 76086 USA
Main: (682) 239-6823 info@stress.org

BODY ELECTRIC

Electroceuticals and the Future of Medicine

A documentary film to revolutionize the way we think about health and the human body

The American Institute of Stress is an executive producer of Body Electric: Electroceuticals and the Future of Medicine, a documentary film aimed to revolutionize the way we think about health and the human body. This 68 minute movie, by British producer/director/writer Justin Smith, is available online and on DVD for purchase through AIS.



Click here to buy the DVD for \$19.95
or the digital streaming for \$9.95

Members stream for free at stress.org



www.stress.org

CONTENTS

Volume 9 | Number 4

Winter 2020/2021

- 6** Editor's Message
By Cynthia Ackrill, MD, PCC, FAIS
- 8** Personal Leader Transformation in a Post Trauma World
By Charlie Grantham
- 14** How to Thrive in a Crisis
By Dennis Morris, MSW
- 18** The Loneliness Crisis
By Cynthia Howard
- 22** What if Your Relationships Felt as Graceful as Fred and Ginger?
By Maureen McCarthy
- 30** Finding the Light Within the Darkness of Winter
By Jen Butler
- 36** Ten Essential Things You Need to Know to Meditate
By James Porter



Editor's Message



2020 has certainly dealt us a full smorgasbord of stressors, uncertainties, and even full-blown traumas to deal with. Our nervous systems are not designed to constantly be under that much stress. The result: many of us are exhausted! And when we are exhausted our brains have an even harder time making sense of our world, managing our feelings, and coming up with creative ways to maintain health and well-being in the midst of such radical change. Now is a great time to take a deep breath (or 10!), and first recognize, with compassion and without judgment, all that you have been feeling, what has changed for you, and what you need right now. In other words, it is time for a self-hug and some recharging!

After you take that pause and meet some of your energy needs, it's an opportune time to get curious. Curiosity is a great stress-antidote, bringing your frontal lobe back on board to explore how you want to process all this change. What would you like to learn from this chaotic year? What matters most to you? Who matters most to you? Where do you need some clarity and how would you like to transform yourself to emerge stronger, wiser, and more resilient?

These are big, reflective questions that do not need to be rushed or answered in ink. But this shift from reactivity to more intentional exploration of what works for you and your life will put you back in control of your journey

to contentment. Of course, if you, like many, feel overwhelmed, this may seem daunting. We're glad you are here. Contentment magazine is where our experts and the actual science of stress can offer you the motivation, clarity, and strategies to start your shift.

Charlie Grantham, PhD, MSH, FAIS, APF continues his inspiring look at how we move beyond managing the crises, traumas, and radical changes of the past year to transform our leadership. He offers well-laid out strategies for the systemic change that will help leaders steer the course, using a system of measured engagement, where you can recognize and resolve the natural resistance, and adopt new belief systems to emerge transformed and stronger. This article is a follow up to his discussion of engagement in the last issue of Contentment and will be followed by part 2 in the spring edition. Taking time to reflect on your story and how you want to learn and grow from these chaotic times can change the trajectory of your life—well worth the read!

In the same spirit of deciding how to transform your resilience, Dennis Morris, MSW, CEO of The Institute of Respect, shares an inspiring list of attributes of survivors and the character strengths associated with resilience. Likely you already rely on some of these, perhaps too heavily at times. Or when you are overwhelmed, you may have forgotten what has worked for you in the past. This is a great time to reflect on what strengths

you have, how to make them work for you, and what others you would like to develop as you move forward. Life holds more challenges ahead; it can feel really powerful to learn, grow, and meet them with more strength.

Cynthia Howard, RN, CNC, PhD tackles an issue that has plagued so many this year—loneliness. It's not just a sad feeling; it is a physical and mental health risk, already at epidemic levels before the pandemic forced us to further distance from each other. This topic has been swept under the carpet for too long, and Cynthia's exploration will not only help you "name it to tame it" but also offers suggestions for setting yourself up for the intentional cultivation of connections that will feed your well-being.

It's no secret that this past year has been hard on forming and maintaining relationships, but imagine trying to forge a new one when you were just told you have an imminently terminal disease? Maureen McCarthy once again shares more of the wisdom she has so creatively extracted from her incredible challenges. Maureen's decision to focus on clarity instead of certainty helped her create *The Blueprint of We*, a clear strategy for creating a meaningful, values-oriented relationship with less stress and more joy. We can all benefit from her brilliance and spirit.

As the northern hemisphere moves into the shortest days, Jen Butler, MEd, BCC, DAIS offers an in-depth look at the winter blues and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Those of us who are

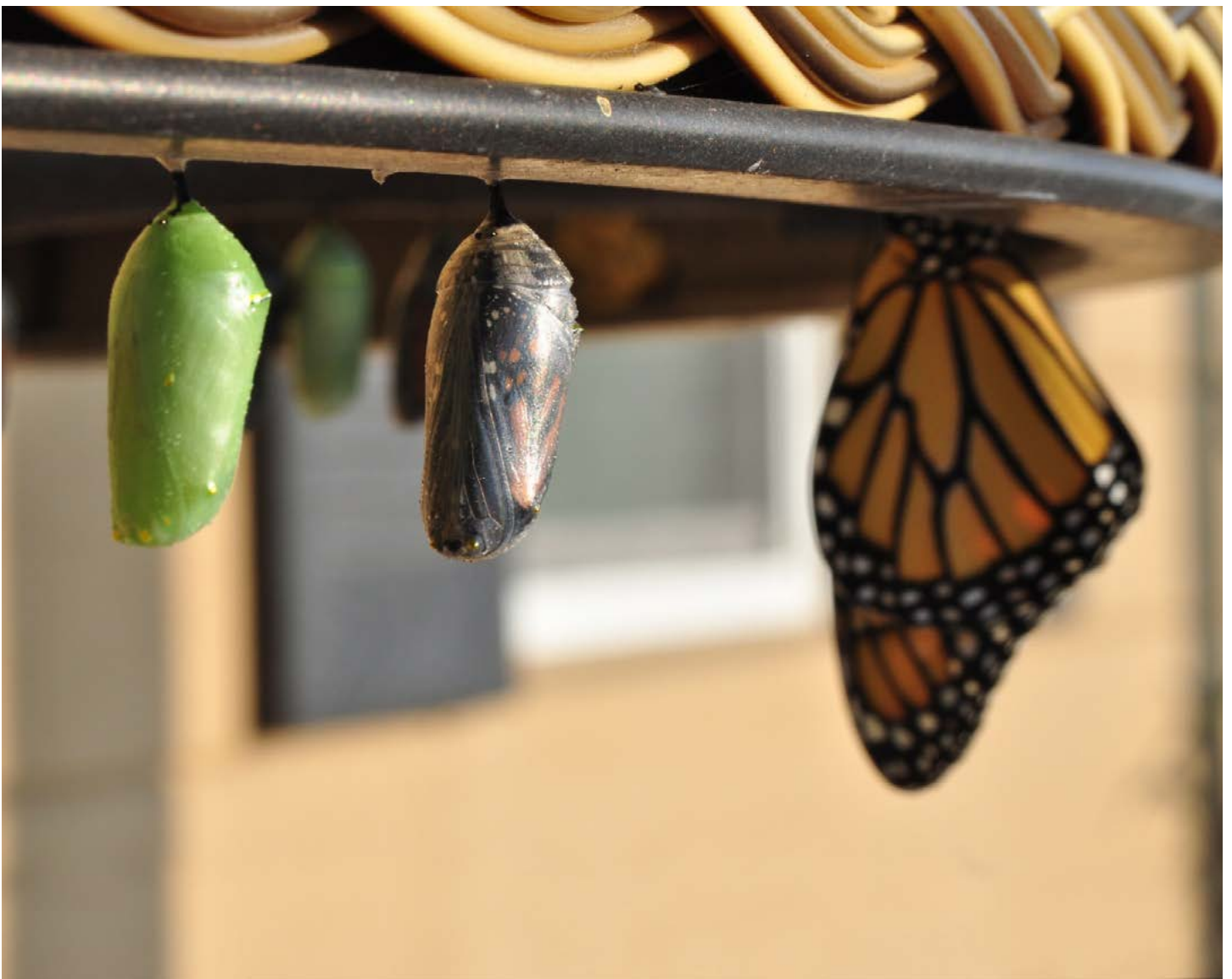
already prone to winter blues, as well as others whose mood coping skills are just worn out from this rough year, are worried about keeping up our moods through the dark of winter. Jen explains the science behind this common phenomenon, differentiates the blues from SAD and gives some great suggestions for "finding the light" you need to build your resilience—another opportunity to apply strategies to emerge stronger.

And finally, you will notice that so many of our experts mention meditation because of its proven benefit in helping your brain handle challenges. Sadly, because meditation is often misunderstood, many folks have been hesitant to experiment with its power. It is truly not just for Tibetan monk wannabes. James Porter, CEO of StressStop, succinctly explains 10 essential things you should know about meditation, demystifying the process and providing simple steps for you to give it a try. Why not make meditation the gift you give yourself for 2021 and beyond? There is simply no better return on the investment of your time.

I hope this issue inspires you to spend a little time in reflection to capture the wisdom and lessons of a difficult year, so you can move into 2021 feeling clear, strong, and armed with tools to create well-being and contentment no matter what life throws at you.

Cynthia Ackrill, MD, PCC, FAIS
Editor

Personal Leader Transformation – *in a* – Post Trauma World



By Reverend Charles Grantham, PhD, MSH, FAIS, APF

We are living in a period of almost unprecedented multiple traumas: a pandemic, economic dissent, social unrest, and political paralysis. Yes, times like this have presented themselves before, but probably not in the direct experience of our lives. This article is the first in a two-part series. I will speak mostly from the perspective of a person's relationship to their work life and from personal experience as a trauma survivor.¹

This installment will focus on why you should care and what's the story? I'll follow up in the next issue with examples of personal leadership transformation and some suggested next steps for you.

So What?

The revolution in the workplace and our relationship to work are accelerating exponentially. The COVID19 pandemic and collapse of global commerce was merely a fuse that lit the rocket ship which was already primed for liftoff.

These long-term trends are now becoming the new normal. The issue is how the new normal will become the sustainable natural. The old social contract in the workplace focused on the employer taking responsibility for employee's development and relevance to the work they were doing for the organization. That contract began losing altitude in the 1990's

and the elimination of it was an unspoken reality by the early 2000's.

Let's start with the reality, aside from all the political pundits and commercially motivated 'media.' Point number 1 is that the basic relationship between a person and the employer is quickly evolving. Soon (within 5 years) a new category of legal relationships will emerge which doesn't even exist in case law or legal precedent today. People will become enterprises onto themselves and behave accordingly. Do you know how to do that? What development strategies will you deploy to cope with those systemic changes? My guess is that you don't have answers to those questions and that is why you should care about what I am going to offer.

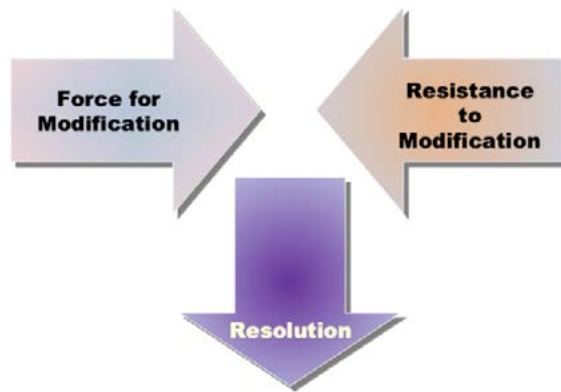
What's the story?

What is required in a post COVID-19 world? Let me re-frame this discussion a bit. It is NOT Change Management; it IS Leadership Transformation. Change management implies incremental modifications in existing processes and is associated with management fashions of the industrial age.² Leadership transformation is about adopting new belief systems, associated attitudes, and ultimately, evolutionary supportive behaviors in the workplace. There is no return to the old pre-COVID19 normal.

I've seen this movie before. I have lived through and survived this kind of transformation. The good news is

Leadership transformation is about adopting new belief systems, associated attitudes, and ultimately, evolutionary supportive behaviors in the workplace.

that there is hope if you set the right intention. This transformation has three dialectically related parts: first, the force for modification – a thesis; second, the resistance to that modification – an antithesis; and finally, a resolution of that conflict – a synthesis.



Force for Modification

The force for modification is the process of transformation told as a story. It is a seven-step process that leaders pass through as they adopt new belief systems. Examples include Joseph Campbell’s “The Hero’s Journey”³ or a commonly used screenplay technique called “Save The Cat.”⁴ The steps and key questions look like this:

- Launch – What is it that I am so anxious about?
- Connection – Is it me or is everyone else crazy?
- Dividing – What do I need to serve larger than myself?
- Agreement – What mental state do I need to be in?
- Approaching – What help do I need?
- Dismissal – How to get rid of old baggage?
- Awakening – How do I wake up?

You go through this process in ordered steps. You usually encounter a mentor or ‘helper’ between stages 2 (connection) and 3 (dividing) when you enter the realm of the unknown. Along the way, there are

challenges, a transformative “dark night of the soul” (stage 6 – dismissal), and finally, a return to the known with a gift of new insight and motivation. At each stage a key question is presented which must be solved before moving forward, sort of like being given Koan’s to solve during Zen training.⁵

Resistance to Modification

While you (the Hero in the story) are traveling through this process, you will be met with resistances – some internal and most external.

When faced with a life situation that requires people to change their behavior, attitudes or ultimately their entire belief systems, people resist. It’s not so much they resist the change; they are fighting against having change forced on them. The deeper the change required, the more severe the reaction.

Until people realize that the pain to remain in the current state is greater than the pain to make the change, people will resist. For example, think of the pain involved in:

- Weight Watchers requiring behavior and attitude adjustment.
- Military indoctrination requiring complete behavior and attitude adoption of new peer groups.
- Addiction recovery requiring new behaviors, attitudes, social groups, and acceptance of new beliefs – the proverbial “Come to Jesus” moment. Let’s scale that.

This diagram shows the severity of resistance scales from mild curiosity to outright hostility. Much of our current social unrest can be understood as a reaction to a set of traditional beliefs about power and status relations between economic and racial groups being called into question.



Adapting to this resistance begins at the bottom (level 0) – meeting people where they are currently. Next up is Level 1, and so on. Experience tells us that it takes approximately six months of concentrated personal development to move through each of these levels.⁶

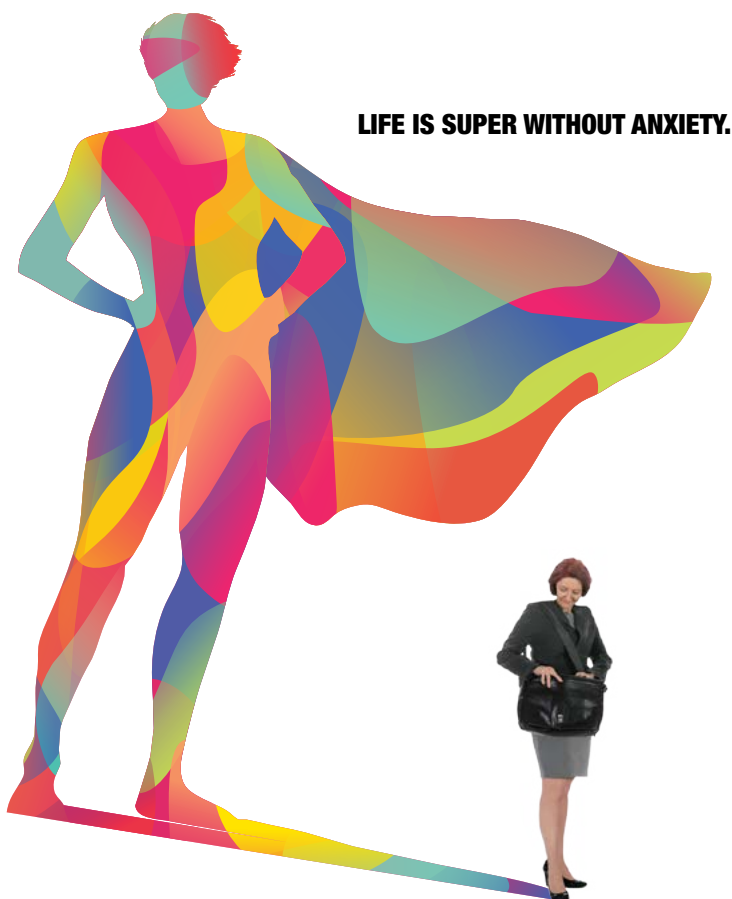
Reconciling the Forces

So, how can you reconcile the pull of forces for modification with the

push of resistances? Your primary task while passing through this transition is to reconcile, or resolve, these forces of change and resistance. I believe the most expeditious way to do this is to employ a guided social-psychological activity of engagement. Don't run away, hide or go into denial. Confront it and actively engage. In the context presented here, work engagement is defined as the:

“Harnessing of organization member’s selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances.”⁷

Your development task is to “stage-manage” your experience of the workplace. Just think of the changes in work COVID19 has brought. Most of you are working on a new ‘stage’ – at home. The lights, camera, and audience have all changed. Zoom anyone?



Alpha-Stim is the drug-free, clinically proven treatment to alleviate anxiety, depression, insomnia, and pain.

Get dramatic relief fast. Alpha-Stim® is an FDA-cleared, easy-to-use, handheld prescription medical device that treats anxiety without lasting side effects or risk of addiction. Get started at alpha-stim.com.



ALPHA-STIM®

Alpha-Stim and the Alpha-Stim logo are registered trademarks of Electromedical Products International, Inc. © 2020 Electromedical Products International, Inc. All rights reserved. Read a full disclosure of the minor and self-limiting risks here: alpha-stim.com/risk.

The good news is that engagement can be reliably measured to track the transformation process's effectiveness.⁸ Remember the old saw, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it"? The same applies to transformation. There are three major components to engagement in the context of transformation: cognition (thinking); engagement with work tasks, emotional attachment to functions and team members; and their experience of the environment's physical aspects.⁹



Wrap Up

Successfully navigating through and beyond the chaos and traumas of 2020 is about Personal Leadership Transformation – not change management. This process has three parts: your motivation for evolution and

the journey you need to embark upon; your work organization's resistance to having their behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs changed; and the guidance system of measured engagement used to steer the course.

This Personal Leadership Transformation is especially relevant in the supposed 'return to work' transition following extended periods of isolation and dislocation. The cognitive and emotional vectors of engagement are of prime importance. Hence, we need transformed leaders, not 'up-skilled managers.'

What are some specific examples of this kind of transformation? What should your next steps be? That's the topic of the next article.

References

1. https://stress.org/wp-content/themes/Avada-child/lib/3d-flip-book/3d-flip-book/?mag_id=16470, 72-76.
2. https://is.theorizeit.org/wiki/Management_fashion_theory
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero's_journey
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blake_Snyder
5. <https://www.learnreligions.com/introduction-to-koans-449928>
6. "The Future of Work: The Promise of the New Digital Work Society" C. Grantham (2000) McGraw-Hill: New York (Chapter 4).
7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work_engagement#cite_note-1
8. https://www.stress.org/wp-content/themes/Avada-child/lib/3d-flip-book/3d-flip-book/?mag_id=17649, 30-34.
9. There is a rich research literature on this topic that is beyond the scope of this introductory discussion. If you want to explore this in more detail, please contact the author, Charles Grantham, at <mailto:cegrantham@gmail.com>, for a white paper.

Reverend Charles Grantham, PhD, MSH, FAIS, APF is the Founder of the Awakeningtowholeness.net where he pursues his priorities of teaching, writing, speaking and mentoring. Focused now on wellness, wellbeing and wholeness.

He received his PhD in Sociology from the University of Maryland in 1980. He has published eleven books and several dozen technical papers. He is a frequent speaker at international events and a "go to" resource for the media on a wide range of workplace issues — ranging from psychology to public policy.

He also is a certified Master of Healing Arts is a credentialed Reiki Master/Teacher.

He is a Viet Nam combat Veteran having served 8 years in the U.S. Army as a Chief Warrant Officer in the Intelligence Corps. That time was followed by successful careers in academia as a Professor and in multi-national technology companies as an Executive Director of Research and Development. He has now retired and moved to Baja – oh, I mean Tucson, AZ.





IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS, YOU HAVE TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.

For so many Americans, “mysterious” problems ranging from mild to severe are caused by that scourge of modern life – stress. That realization is the first step toward healing, but it often raises many more questions that must be addressed. How is stress affecting my life? My relationships? My work? My happiness? What can I do to reduce or better cope with it? Our Stress Mastery Questionnaire – an easy and confidential online self-assessment that comes with our Stress Mastery Guide and Workbook – can help you find answers. And life-changing solutions.

Click
to get
started



SMQ
STRESS MASTERY QUESTIONNAIRE

How to Thrive in a Crisis



By Dennis Morris, MSW

Last week a client asked, “How do we emerge from a crisis and reach whole new levels of performance?” That’s a question many of us are thinking about. Can I come out of this a better parent, team member or partner? How do I do that? A good place to start is to take a look at the attributes of people who do well in a crisis. That gives us an idea of what qualities we need to cultivate. Knowing our signature attributes and how they operate gives us a leg up in handling any crisis.

1 Persevere and stay engaged

It’s a big one. Even though things are falling apart, our tenacity or grit is a critical element to stay engaged, search for new coping strategies and unique solutions. We strengthen our fortitude and inspire colleagues by seeing things to the end even if it’s not picture perfect.

2 See stressors as opportunities

Those who see the crisis as an opportunity to grow do better in any change event. Challenge yourself. Ask what can I contribute? What can I do to make things better? What’s my purpose? How can I apply my expertise and knowledge? What can I bring to the table to influence the outcomes?

3 Execute courage

Courage is the nucleus of how we make decisions, take action, speak our piece and stand up for our beliefs. Without it we fail to live up to what we know is right. With it, we are true to ourselves.

Strengthen your courage in every action. Make sure you stop throughout the day to take a breath and remind yourself of your acts of courage. Each time our courage leads the way we are stronger and clearer about where we are going.

4 Show empathy

Empathy is a great attribute. But if you don’t put it into action, who cares? Use practical acts of compassion to let others know you hear them, care about them and are looking out for their welfare. The wonderful and widely overlooked bonus of empathy is it lowers our own stress. That’s right. You’ll come out ahead if you look out for others.

5 Be open to change

If you’re open to change, you’re more receptive to what comes your way. Being open requires vulnerability. It means you can accept you don’t have all the answers. That places you in a stronger position to learn and understand what’s happening, assess how to respond, collaborate, learn from others and test out new ideas. On the flip side if you’re a closed-door atrophy sets in. You can’t be defensive and a learner at the same time unless you only want to learn what you think. Good luck with that.

6 Understand the problem

Whether it’s a family problem, work issue or community crisis, understanding the problem in depth helps you prepare and create an action plan. Knowledge gives us insights to assess how we measure up to the task at hand. If you’re looking for a solution there’s no gain in

Knowing our signature attributes and how they operate gives us a leg up in handling any crisis.

underestimating or overestimating the seriousness of the problem.

7 Build on realistic optimism

Realistic optimism is the way to forge ahead. We want leaders and colleagues who recognize we're in tough times and inspire us, help us see what we can do to turn things around, provide hope and chart a realistic path to a positive end point.

8 Maintain a sound support system and balanced life

People who thrive in a crisis are not obsessed with the crisis twenty-four seven. They create time for their family and friends. We need joy, fun and time with loved ones and supportive communities that nourish our souls. And don't forget that it's okay to take a

break and turn on Netflix.

9 Employ resilience

Resilience means adapting to changing conditions, bouncing back and recovering from adversity. What could be more important in a crisis? Resilient team members and leaders know how to innovate. They are the ones who keep coming back with fresh perspectives. They have guts. What are you doing to coach for resilience in your organization? How do you cultivate and celebrate resilience? How do you show others you value it? One act of resilience inspires others to develop their resilience.

10 Know your abilities

What are my competencies? Knowing them enables you to maximize your best efforts.

11 Regulate your emotions

When we are stressed, we may feel testy, sensitive, anxious or afraid. Keep your feelings in check. Slow down and take note that everyone is stressed. Use your confidants or mentors for support. Don't go it alone. In a crisis event we're on high alert, running full speed ahead and not in the best position to self-assess. Take stock of your strengths and review them throughout the day. Don't judge your emotions – manage them.

12 Tolerate ambiguity

We are globally interconnected and overloaded with information that arrives at lightning speed. We see technologies becoming obsolete overnight. Life is more unpredictable. Leaders who are good at managing change, handling a variety of inputs at the same time, sorting through information quickly, thinking like entrepreneurs and reading others accurately excel at managing stress. They are comfortable with uncertainty and have a high tolerance for ambiguity.

STRESSED?

Stress is an emotional habit, an indicator there's a puppy upstairs [your brain], chewing up your house, your shoes and your underwear. Learn how to train the puppy and begin your path to stress elimination.

BEGIN TRAINING



nuuaria

13 Take action

People who push themselves to take action in a crisis cope better. They develop a game plan, put it in play, assess if it's working and decide on the next steps.

14 Lead with your principles

When you lead with your principles your colleagues see your commitment to your core values. They're inspired because they realize you're driven by higher sense of calling and not going off in whatever direction the wind blows. Charting a course based on principles builds trust and demonstrates your integrity.

Here's what I suggest you do next

First, look over the 14 attributes and mark which ones are your five signature strengths. You probably use them all the time. They have served you well. Unfortunately, if they are overused, they can actually get in your way. Let's say perseverance has been the backbone of your biggest achievements. It could be so high that you sometimes overwhelm everyone in the room. If no one can get a word in edgewise in any meeting with you, why would they want to work with

you? How do your signature strengths undermine what you want to achieve? Be honest. What strategies can you use to make sure they don't overrun you and everyone else?

After you prioritize your top assets, step back and ask yourself which ones do you need to bolster? Then put together a plan on how you will do that. Don't go overboard. Try working on one attribute a week. Give yourself plenty of breathing room to make a few practical improvements.

If you're not sure which strengths you need to develop, ask someone you trust to share with you how they would prioritize your 14 attributes? How does their list compare to yours? Use your signature strengths to hear them out and to discover how they see you. Remember that it's an intentional learning conversation and not a debate. It's a time to reflect and not deflect. You don't have to convince them of anything. You only want to see what they see.

Knowing how others experience you can help you figure out how you handle yourself in any situation. Think of it as a gift you can give yourself this holiday season.

Dennis Morris, MSW, CEO of Institute of Respect. As a coach, facilitator, CEO and founder of the Institute of Respect, Dennis helps executives and managers move beyond their own perceived limitations to lead with their principles, increase their self-awareness, and become exceptional leaders who achieve higher-level results. He specializes in working with professionals to escalate their skills by showing them ways to develop genuine, respect-centered connections—connections that clients come to perceive as critical to their long-term success.

The services Dennis offers draw on his 30 years of experience as a senior leader, executive coach, psychotherapist, mediator and educator. But what sets him apart from other consultants is his experience of more than a decade working in behavioral health before becoming a consultant. As Vice President of clinical programs, he led a team of psychotherapists serving clients in five counties. In addition, he coordinated and managed consultation and behavioral health services to employees of corporate and government clients including Merck, Heinz and the U.S. Postal Service. This unique background allows Dennis to help his clients think more creatively and strategically to achieve remarkable results. Dennis can be reached at djmorris@ptd.net.



A woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a white t-shirt, is shown in profile. She has a thoughtful or somber expression, resting her chin on her hand. Her hand is resting on a dark, textured surface. The background is a plain, light gray wall.

The Loneliness Crisis



By Cynthia Howard RN, CNC, PhD, FAIS

Loneliness was an epidemic even before the pandemic that made it worse. It is hard to believe that loneliness has been on the rise in such a global, hyper-connected society. As people have become more intimate with their devices, there is less face-to-face interaction, and with that, a decreasing ability to listen, empathize, and connect in a wholehearted way.

Loneliness has been found to be a risk factor for early mortality by up to 32%.¹ It increases the risk for obesity and depression as well as other issues that negatively impact the quality of life.² And when ignored, it is easy to see how this can start a downward spiral for health and a prosperous and full life.

Research aside, let's get real – loneliness is painful! It is physically and emotionally painful to be disconnected, experience social isolation, and all the side effects of feeling lonely. One of the reasons loneliness may have increased during this epidemic is because of the shame that one feels when faced with this disconnect.

Families have broken down and spread out, living all over the country. Many communities have changed from being physical neighborhoods where you walked to the bus and said hello to the shop owners on the block, to a virtual world where you can log in, with or without a camera. It is easy to see how social isolation has increased, setting up greater loneliness.

One of my clients, who we can call Betsy, talked about the impact Covid-19 had on her. Initially, she felt relieved to

Loneliness has been found to be a risk factor for early mortality by up to 32%.¹

have a “pause” from her rushed pace of running from the gym, to the office, to her association meetings, and then to school. But within a few days, she missed her short and friendly conversations at the coffee shop. When at the gym, she had listened to inspirational material and now she was no longer feeding her spirit with those positive messages. She had taken for granted the smiling faces she experienced at the association meetings and realized, that in her busy-ness, she had not taken the time to develop closer relationships with those with whom she had been interacting casually.

As the quarantine continued and she worked from home, she felt lonely. Looking back, Betsy told me she had not realized how important these coffee shop and professional meeting interactions had been to her, how they gave her a sense of connection. Without these, it became painfully clear to her that she needed friends. Yet, she

felt unprepared as to how to go about that.

Who knew that making friends would be hard?

As it turns out making friends is harder today than ever before. With the spreading of families and the shift to virtual communities, there is a breakdown in social interaction and the ability to form meaningful connections.

Social media provides a virtual experience but no real relationship, giving people an illusion of connection.³ Behind the scenes, people are comparing what they see in posts, airbrushed for an optimal image, to how they feel on the inside. This social comparison leaves many with the feeling of not measuring up. And this makes it hard to have the confidence to be vulnerable enough to take a risk on a face-to-face interaction.

I hear from so many of my clients that this quarantine has left them wanting to

**LIFE IS EPIC
WITHOUT INSOMNIA.**



Alpha-Stim is the drug-free, clinically proven treatment to alleviate anxiety, depression, insomnia, and pain.

Get dramatic relief fast. Alpha-Stim® is an FDA-cleared, easy-to-use, handheld prescription medical device that treats insomnia without lasting side effects or risk of addiction. Get started at alpha-stim.com.



ALPHA-STIM®

Alpha-Stim and the Alpha-Stim logo are registered trademarks of Electromedical Products International, Inc. © 2020 Electromedical Products International, Inc. All rights reserved. Read a full disclosure of the minor and self-limiting risks here: alpha-stim.com/risk.

have face-to-face encounters and “real” interactions. I understand this to mean authentic relationships based on intimacy (into-me-see?) and vulnerability.

The way to make friends and begin an authentic connection is to recognize that social media is like fast food; it will not sustain you and should only be consumed every once in a while. Instead, find ways to interact with others, whether it is a volunteer experience, dog walking at the shelter, supporting your food bank or local church, or taking an exercise class. Find ways to greet people with a genuine smile and full eye contact.

Develop Your ‘Make New Friends’ Strategy

- 1. Have a strategy.** Recognize that having a strategy to make new friends is how you will break the habit of “going it alone.” Having a plan will break through the mindset, “this is how I have always done this.”
- 2. Make a list of the new things you want to learn.** Do you want to ride bikes, learn to ice skate, play bridge, play the piano, wind-surf? What is it you have wanted to learn? Write it down and set up your timeline for trying it out.
- 3. Keep a journal.** Write about your experiences and clear your mind as you venture out and try new activities. It is easy to let the frustration of trying new

activities keep you from continuing on your journey. Journaling will also help you acknowledge how far you have stretched yourself. Celebrate your small wins.

- 4. Everyday get to know one new person.** This can be at work, in the coffee shop, at church, or on the train. Smile, and ask them their name. You can even tell them you have a goal to meet one new person a day, and this may open up a wonderful conversation about how isolated they feel!
- 5. Just do it.** Nike has a brilliant tagline that applies to taking risks and stepping out of your comfort zone.

As humans, we are hardwired to connect and crave a sense of belonging. Make this your goal as you move into a new year: expand your face-to-face interactions and find ways to experience more meaningful connections more often. Your daily interactions are the foundation of friendships and will help you flourish emotionally, physically and spiritually.

References

- Hawkey, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2010). Loneliness matters: a theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Annals of behavioral medicine* : a publication of the Society of Behavioral Medicine, 40(2), 218–227. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-010-9210-8>
- Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Baker M, et al. Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality - A Meta-Analytic Review. *Perspectives on Psychology*. Published online March 11 2015
- Wrzus, C., Hänel, M., Wagner, J., & Neyer, F. J. (2013). Social network changes and life events across the life span: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(1), 53–80. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028601>

The way to make friends and begin an authentic connection is to recognize that social media is like fast food; it will not sustain you and should only be consumed every once in a while.

Cynthia Howard RN, CNC, PhD, Executive Coach, CEO, Chief Energy Officer, Ei Leadership.

Improving Performance and Well-Being helps leaders, professionals and organizations get more done by doing less. She confronts the tough issues using proven tools to transform workplace chaos and complexity into progress and consistent results. Green Belt in Lean Sigma. Certified Scrum Master.

Cynthia researched the impact of stress on healthcare practitioners during her graduate degrees and has been in private coaching practice for over 20 years. Cynthia is a pioneer of the resilient mindset and embraces essential oils as one of the power tools to transform perspective.

Author: What's Stopping You Today? 6 Keys to Energize your Success, The Resilient Leader Mindset Makeover: Energize your Leadership, H.E. A. L.: Healthy Emotions Abundant Life. www.eileadership.org





What if Your Relationships Felt as Graceful as Fred and Ginger?

Relationship Design in Uncertain Times

By Maureen K. McCarthy, Co-Founder, The Center for Collaborative Awareness

Relationships are never guaranteed but stepping into one feels even more precarious when you meet the year your doctors say you will be dead from a rare, genetic lung disease.

There are many things we do in our relationships as a way to exert a modicum

of control over our future. It is our brain's deep-seated desire for certainty coupled with our deep-rooted social nature. Society helps shape how we behave as we follow agreed-upon norms of how to date, get engaged, and get married. Culture is ultimately a collective agreement on how to better predict our future no matter what form a relationship takes, be it business or personal. We believe following the norms

protects us from uncertainty. So, what do we do as the landscape we currently live in becomes more and more unpredictable? I personally found the answer at the cross section of clarity and design.

When I met my husband, Zelle, the year I was supposed to die, the traditional ways of embarking on a relationship were not really an option. Contemplating a new relationship as you put your affairs in order feels bizarre and somewhat unfair to the other person. As my disease progressed, and I lost precious lung capacity, I would need to rely more heavily on others for simple daily tasks. That level of uncertainty was daunting, and it enveloped more than just health concerns; it impacted my finances, my ability to work, the care of my two young children, and the rapidly escalating levels of pain in my physical body.

But it also brought an unanticipated gift — we did not measure each other up against forever.

The forever myth is an interesting one, as we know it doesn't always play out, especially in a world where we live far longer than our ancestors. The concept of forever is another way we manage uncertainty and calm our nervous system. We try to lock things down to ensure they will be there for many years to come. In the absence of measuring someone up against forever, you begin to decide if you want to be with them today. It becomes a very present moment experience of saying, "Do I want to give you a call, have dinner, watch a movie with you today?"

There is something beautiful about

being present and choosing someone for today, yet without the cultural norms to help guide our future, we did not really know what we were doing. What kind of relationship is this? We were both interested in monogamous, committed relationship, but to what were we committing?

Mindful Design

Two months into the relationship we were watching an old Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers film that spurred an intriguing conversation. Through their iconic musical films of the 1930's and 40's, Fred and Ginger toyed with gravity. Their fluid movement is so graceful and effortless that they make it seem as if anyone could get up and do it. As the Washington Post wrote in Astaire's obituary, "Theirs was the most rarefied form of communication ever invented. Who could watch without wanting to be one of them?" Which is the question Zelle and I asked ourselves: what if our day-to-day relationship could be as graceful and effortless as Fred and Ginger dancing? If we build a good foundation, could our day-to-day dance become effortless and graceful? That night we agreed that our ultimate goal, our commitment to one another, was to stay in a state of grace with each other the rest of our lives. And grace in this instance was not spiritual or religious, it was purely the grace of Fred and Ginger. I went home that night feeling very connected to Zelle and then woke up with questions on my mind. Everyone starts their relationships believing they will be in a good place till the end. It is the

The forever myth is an interesting one, as we know it doesn't always play out, especially in a world where we live far longer than our ancestors.

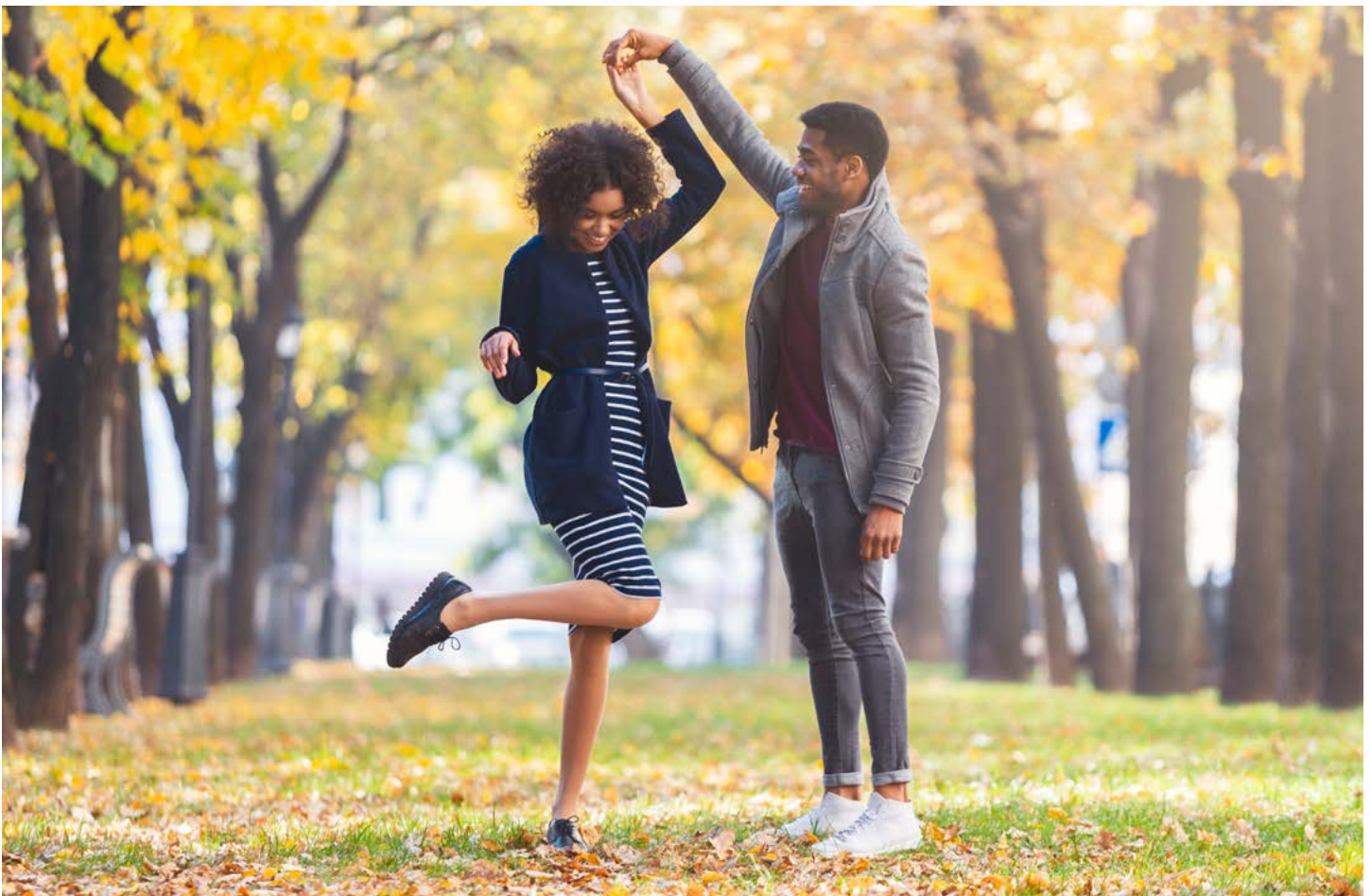
dopamine hit we get during the in-love state that convinces us that everything will be good forever more. Yet why do some relationships work while others do not?

What would Zelle and I need to mindfully design in order to make good on our commitment to be in a state of grace? And how can that help you design your best relationship in this changing world?

When you apply a design lens to your relationship, you become more aware of the degree to which design influences everything around us: our cars, smartphones, furniture, even the wastebasket in your bathroom was designed by someone. Everything benefits from great design — it reduces frustration, stress and wasted energy while optimizing usability, effectiveness, meaningfulness, and fun. Yet we had not come across anything that would assist us in designing our relationship.

Our culture does not teach us how to mindfully design who we are together. Instead we tend to fall into it as we lean back on the cultural norms to help us feel certain. In our more complex landscape, many of the old ideas of how to be in relationship do not feel accessible to us. The general definitions and rules about who and what we are together are also becoming broader and less traditional. We are living in the midst of a cultural transition and it can be quite confusing for everyone.

The idea of designing who we were together became incredibly intriguing. I decided to write down a few things that would help build a better foundation, in essence creating a working design document for the relationship. There were 5 Components that I wrote about for myself; a bit about who I am, how I operate, and what I was looking to create. I wanted to share what I knew about myself



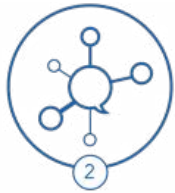
and invite Zelle to write his half of the 5 Components as well. From there we could exchange what we wrote and have a good conversation to ask questions and learn more. We could use what we wrote as individuals to begin custom designing who we wanted to be together.

The 5 Components

I chose each of the 5 Components to help us find clarity when certainty was not available.



1
THE STORY OF US



2
INTERACTION STYLES & STRESS MESSAGES



3
CUSTOM DESIGN



4
QUESTIONS FOR PEACE & POSSIBILITY



5
SHORT & LONG-TERM AGREEMENTS

1. The Story of Us

There is always a story of how and why we come together. There are billions of people on the planet and many possibilities for what I could do with the last year of my life. Why Zelle? Why now? Why intimate relationship and not friendship? It felt supremely important to know why I was in and to capture it on paper. I also wanted to write about what I appreciated about him, so that if I ever lost sight of it, I could read what I wrote and remember those good feelings.

2. Interaction Styles & Stress Messages

I have certain ways of being when I am in flow. By sharing these Zelle would begin to build an awareness of what it looks like when I am having a good day, feeling connected and joyful. There are also patterns I engage when I am triggered or under stress. Sharing what I look like across the continuum in our design document meant that Zelle would not be surprised when I even-

tually acted like a lunatic. Because of course I will — it is part of my stress pattern and has nothing to do with him. Even more importantly, the design document gave me the opportunity to create invitations around how he might help me have more good days, as well as pull me back from the cliff when I was in stress. Zelle likes to call the Stress Messages portion of the document the 'What to Do in Case of Fire Manual' because this set of instruc-

tions, directly from the source, told him what he might do when I am on fire. Instructions, by the way, are often the opposite of what it looks like I might want. Knowing ahead of time what the other person looks like in stress means you are less apt to engage your own stress response which can fan the flames. The invitations I gave him offered him possibilities, but to be clear, they were invitations and not demands. He has options, but it is ultimately his choice to engage them each time.

3. Custom Design

This component began with a list of my top values. I knew that we needed to have clarity on what mattered most to each of us, and then use those values as a lens through which we designed the relationship. People are never triggered unless they believe one or more of their values is not being honored, so let's determine what they are. I really thought about what my top five or six values might be and how would I define them. I wanted each of us to know

Everything benefits from great design — it reduces frustration, stress and wasted energy while optimizing usability, effectiveness, meaningfulness, and fun.

what really mattered to the other.

My personal values of love, clarity, creativity and joy helped me write about what I would like to explore or create in the relationship. I wrote about what I would like us to do together, new things I wanted to learn, and agreements we could consider that could make the relationship healthy and engaging. I didn't know a lot at this point, but it helped open my mind just by making a start. I had never taken the time to think about what I really wanted in a relationship on a daily basis. I was also excited to find out what Zelle's values and ideas might be. This is where the design process began to light me up. The design did not have to be fully formed or complex because this would be an interactive document that we would upgrade and change as we learned more and evolved.

4. Questions for Peace and Possibility

I have a visual in my head of being in a disagreement with someone and Gandhi or Martin Luther King happens to be sitting in a little chair in the corner of the room. What would I do differently? What would they say, and what would their mere presence remind me to take into consideration? Of course, they will never be in a room with me, but I believe this visual helps my own internal wisdom come to the surface. When you are in the midst of an argument, everything feels precarious. In this component I wanted to capture my most emotionally intelligent self on paper ahead of time, so it would be available when my stress response takes my calm, compassionate self offline.

I crafted a short list of questions and reminders that I thought would be useful if Zelle and I were triggered, and we

Maryland University of Integrative Health **PCE** Professional and Continuing Education

The four courses below are available through a partnership with MUIH Professional and Continuing Education (PCE) and are certified by The American Institute of Stress. PCE provides advanced, superior quality, skills-based offerings leading to relevant credentials and real-world application. As a PCE learner, you can quickly expand your knowledge and distinguish yourself as a leader in your field. Additionally, various professional organizations and boards may accept these courses for continuing education requirements. **CLICK TO LEARN MORE.**

The Physiology of Building Stress Resilience	Psychoneuroimmunology - How Thoughts Impact Disease	The Philosophy and Science of Wellbeing Masterclass	PTSD in Client Relationships Masterclass
<p>The Physiology of Building Stress Resilience A Continuing Education Masterclass</p> 	<p>PTSD in Client Relationships A Continuing Education Master Class</p> 	<p>The Philosophy and Science of Wellbeing A Continuing Education Masterclass</p> <p>Maryland University of Integrative Health PCE Professional and Continuing Education</p> 	<p>Psychoneuroimmunology MUIH Lecture Series</p> 

AIS members receive 10% OFF all MUIH courses. If you are a member, contact us for a promo code to enter at checkout.



wanted to come back to center. Questions such as, “Is there anything we need to say to each other that we haven’t been saying? Is there something we need that we’re not getting? Space? Acknowledgment? etc. or Let’s take a walk before we have this conversation.” This list is like having your best third-party mediator available when you need it, and that person happens to be you. My intent was to use our design document when we were in stress, but also as a way to use our stress, not as a warning system, but as a messaging system. Stress in any relationship means that something matters, and I wanted to harness stress to upgrade our design after an argument.

5. Short-term Timeframe

I added this component because I wanted to design a process where we could avoid sweeping things under the rug. In our culture we are often taught to avoid conversations that might get painful. Yet I knew that if I went on a five-mile hike, and in mile one, I got a stick in my shoe, I would stop and take it out. And if that was the case, why would I not want to pause in my relationship to take the proverbial stick out of my shoe — a lack of clarity, a knot in my stomach, tension between us — and have a conversation so that the rest of the hike is really enjoyable?

The Short-term Timeframe is an agreement that links back to our design document. How long am I willing to go before I bring it up with Zelle and use what we wrote to get us back to a good place? I chose 2 days as my Short-term Timeframe. This meant that I would go no longer than 2 days before I would:

1. Ask Zelle to help me find clarity. For me, stress does not mean there is a problem with the people. It means

there is a lack of clarity between them.

2. Re-read our design document to reorient ourselves with the positive perspective of the other person from the Story of Us; reconnect with our Interaction Styles & Stress Messages to soften judgment and engage compassion; and check-in on our values to see how they are playing out in our design.
3. Use our Questions for Peace and Possibility, our most emotionally intelligent selves on paper, to get clarity on what was going on and emerge from the tension better off.

The grace of Fred and Ginger was a remarkable inspiration for the design of our relationship. I wrote the 5 Components in a notebook and gave it to Zelle the next day. I invited him to write his half and a few days later we had a remarkable conversation where we asked questions and got clear on what the other person wrote, taking notes along the way. We laughed...a lot! It felt like we were pioneers embarking on a journey into the unknown. Certainty became less interesting as we were hot on the heels of clarity. Every week or so we would add more to the document as we uncovered new things about one another, which of course impacted our design.

It was fascinating to see how dramatically different this relationship was to any other I had experienced. There was a curiosity and an opening to become lifelong learners of one another and ourselves. We tried a number of things on and experimented to discover what worked and what needed to be upgraded or changed. We took the certainty that our minds were craving and changed it into clarity.

Lifesaving Design

If you haven’t guessed it yet, I have lived past my expiration date! Zelle and I have

been together for twenty years and in that time we have mindfully custom designed a life that is beautifully tailored to us as individuals and as a couple. There is still no cure for my lung disease, and with only 10% lung capacity left, I have been on hospice several times. But I am also one of the healthiest and happiest people you will meet. Zelle often says we need a control group Maureen and Zelle to prove that our design document is the most influential factor in keeping me on the planet. I have since created design documents with many people in my life including my children, family, colleagues, and clients. It has helped me design a life that is much less stressful on both my body and my mind.

We originally called our design document the *State of Grace Document*, but the name has evolved to the *Blueprint of We Collaboration Document*. So many people asked us about it over the years that we began teaching it in both business and personal relationships. It has since moved around the world with people using the same 5 Components in 100+ countries in many languages and cultures.

Zelle and I have been living in an uncertain world for many years. I don't know if I'm going to die tomorrow or live another twenty years, but I do know that I am continually looking to find clarity within my relationships because it makes the world a much calmer, more accessible place to be. Zelle and I are still evolving our Blueprint of We. Our document today looks nothing like it did that first year because we have grown and changed on many levels. It really is a bit

like Fred and Ginger's effortless dance.

4 Ideas to Begin Designing Your Relationship:

1. Write your own Story of Us. Why are you in this particular relationship with this particular person? What you write does not need to be pretty or elegant. Simply share why you are in and why you are drawn to the other person. Be open to questions if they want to learn more.
2. Get curious with yourself about what you look like when you are stressed and what you might need in the midst of it. Write down some ideas and share it with one other person. Ask them to do the same.
3. Create an experiment. For two weeks, create an invitation between the two of you to support each other in providing what you might need in times of stress. Maybe you need words of encouragement, someone to listen, or a change of scenery. Whatever it is, do your best to notice when the other person is in stress and provide what they asked for to move through stress. At the end of the two weeks have a conversation about how it was for each of you and decide if you want to continue the experiment for another two weeks. Rinse and repeat.
4. Choose and define your top 5 values. What you care about should show up in the design of your relationship. Talk about the values that are important to you with someone close to you and see how those values show up in your day-to-day interactions.



Maureen K. McCarthy is the Co-Founder of the Center for Collaborative Awareness and Co-creator of *The Blueprint of We*, a collaboration design document used by organizations and communities in 100+ countries. As a social scientist, Maureen has worked with organizations from Dropbox to the World Relief Organization. She uses the neural circuitry of social connection to harness stress and builds trust in fast-paced environments.

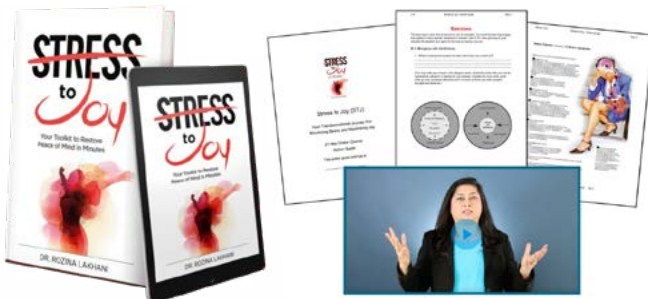


REDUCE YOUR STRESS.

Grow your happiness.

Is stress dragging you down physically and emotionally? The comprehensive, online “Stress to Joy” program, taught by bestselling author and board-certified psychiatrist Rozina Lakhani, MD, MPH, FAIS, gives you the tools you need for a return to joyful living. Dr. Rozina shares her proven stress management techniques in a way that’s both practical and inspirational. The program includes a workbook with step-by-step guidance, and it takes just 15 minutes per day for about three weeks. Make this powerful investment in your health and happiness – and turn the corner from stress to joy.

**CLICK
TO GET
STARTED**



A photograph of a snowy street at night. Several cars are parked along the side of the road, completely covered in a thick layer of snow. In the background, there are multi-story brick buildings with some windows illuminated from within. A street lamp in the middle ground is glowing, casting a warm light on the scene. The overall atmosphere is quiet and still, typical of a winter night.

Finding the Light Within the Darkness of Winter

By Jen Butler, MEd, BCC, DAIS

This is not another article on how 2020 sucks. This is an article about overturning a problem that affects over 10 million Americans every year, with 6% even requiring hospitalizations.¹ This read gives you concrete, scientifically proven ways to avoid the consequences of season affective disorder (SAD).

So why bring up 2020 at the onset? Because going into the darkness of winter this year, many of us are already on the brink of anxiety and depressive disorders while living on or beyond our stress thresholds. A study by the CDC compared similar populations from June 2019 and June 2020 for symptoms of anxiety, depression, and strain. Anxiety disorders rose from 8.1% in 2019 to 25.5% in 2020; depressive disorders tripled (from 6.5% to 24.3%); and mental strain rose from 30.9% to 40.9%.²

What this comes down to is that more people will experience winter blues symptoms for the first time this year because their coping abilities are already depleted, putting them well on their way to SAD.

This is an article for you, your loved ones, your employees, and anyone who wants to find the light within the darkness of winter.

What Are the Winter Blues?

The winter blues commonly involve:

- Lethargy
- Gloominess
- Sleep difficulty
- Changes in eating patterns, especially

- seeking more carbs and comfort foods
- Mood alterations, with an increase in irritability and socially withdrawing.

The blues increase in the darker days of winter, typically starting in November and lasting through March. They occur most often for those living 30-degrees or more north and south of the equator: north of Jacksonville, Florida; Austin, Texas; Cairo, Egypt; and Hangzhou, China; or south of Perth, Australia; Durban, South Africa; and Cordoba, Argentina.³ As many as 20% of the American population and 12.5% of the U.K. population experience winter blues symptoms that impact their daily lives just enough to be a nuisance but not enough to trample over all their joy.⁴

Unlike symptoms of SAD, the winter blues come and go throughout a day or week. For the most part, people enjoy their lives and handle their emotions and few, if any, of their family, friends, and associates notice.

Then there are those people who consistently (year after year) and permanently (no ebb and flow) suffer from a compounding development of symptoms which definitely take over their lives and are noticeable to others. Seasonal affective disorder overwhelms their sense of joy and ability to cope and makes treatment necessary.

Why Do People Get SAD?

The specific causes for both the winter blues and seasonal affective disorder are unknown. According to the Mayo Clinic, scientists know there is a connection to lessening sunlight due to three main factors:

The blues increase in the darker days of winter, typically starting in November and lasting through March.



1. Circadian rhythms

Your sleep-wake cycle is heavily regulated by the number of hours of darkness in a given day. The lack of sunlight in winter disrupts your internal clock, which in turn changes your sleep, mood, and appetite rhythms, leaving you sleepy, disoriented, and irritable.

2. Melatonin overproduction

When it is dark outside, your body produces melatonin to prepare you for sleep. When the darkness of each day lengthens, the rise in melatonin may lead to a constant desire for sleep and an increase in grogginess.

3. Serotonin underproduction

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that helps regulate mood. Reduced sunlight in winter slows your body's production resulting in a deficit of serotonin. You might feel depressive symptoms, such as lack of appetite, poor memory, and

lack of sexual desire.

Three critical risk-factors also attribute to the development of SAD: a family history of SAD or other depressive disorders, a diagnosis of major depressive disorder or bipolar disorder, and the distance you live from the equator.

The good news is there are proven strategies to guide you to the light within the darkness of winter, avoiding winter blues and preventing SAD.

Find the Light

What medical professionals and researchers do know about SAD is that it is very treatable. It relies on finding the light in many forms and threading it into your daily routine.

• Use the Light

Unless you live in the farthest reaches from the equator, you have some sunlight each day during the winter

months. A minimum of 30-minutes of exposure every day, especially in the morning, has been proven to reduce or eliminate SAD symptoms.⁵ Walk, work, play, stand, or sit in your car in the light to trigger the biochemical processes essential to avoiding SAD.

If exposure to natural sunlight is not possible, studies find that bright light works as a treatment. Early morning light therapy reduced SAD symptoms in two-thirds of patients with mild episodes and just under half with moderate to severe episodes in remission.⁶ It takes 1 to 2 weeks of consistent treatment for symptoms to begin to subside, and consistent use of light may prevent relapses throughout the winter.⁷ Communicating with family, co-workers, and employers about the importance of light therapy is essential in heightening their awareness and their empathy for your condition.

Like light, color has a major effect on mood. Posting colorful pictures around your home or work area will boost your mood — and why not lighten your wardrobe, color your hair, or paint your nails with a vibrant color? If the bright colors already around you seem dull and lifeless, you may be depressed and would benefit from consulting with a therapist.⁸

• **Create Emotional Lightness**

What do trees feel when the winter is over?
Releaf.

Okay, maybe not the most sophisticated joke, but relief when spring comes is a feeling shared by most people with the winter blues or SAD. Reminding yourself that spring inevitably arrives may help you through the worst of winter.

Even more important, threading humor into your day will alleviate your symptoms. Humor connects you with other people, reduces tension, gives

you a chance to find your objectivity, and allows you to express frustration in a positive way.⁹ Whether you listen to humor or create it, laughter is medically proven to reduce stress, anxiety, and even physical pain.¹⁰

In addition to looking forward and embracing humor, journaling is a significant help in handling winter blues and the symptoms of SAD. If you journal about your day and feelings during light therapy, you receive a double benefit.

Talk to someone who is sympathetic to your situation — a friend, family member, or therapist who understands that the winter blues and SAD are not something you can simply turn off. They may provide support and companionship as you try to keep your diet, exercise routine, and light therapy on track. When you feel too overwhelmed to eat properly or exercise outside, the encouragement of others will help.

• **Find Spiritual Light**

Meditation is accessible to everyone, through free online courses and apps for your phone or laptop. By turning to meditation during your light therapy or just before you go to sleep at night, you increase the benefit without interfering with your other activities.

Spiritual light is compromised by negative messages and people. Concentrate on positive interactions (lunch with a good friend, a walk with a loved one) and positive social media. If the news causes you stress, stay away from the news — history tells us that very little ever happens that hasn't happened before.

Consider volunteering. Many nonprofit organizations in your community would welcome a volunteer, and the benefits include an increase in life satisfaction, self-esteem, and happiness. One survey of over 1,500

adults found that depressive symptoms decreased by over 4% and mental and physical health increased by over 7% each with voluntarism.¹¹

- **Build Strong Mental Light**

Keeping mentally active is a good tactic, not only for distracting you from a depressive mood, but also for boosting your self-confidence, energizing your conversation, and improving your skills. You might try to master a new subject through reading and research, take an online course, or try a new hobby.

If you find yourself slipping into forgetfulness, inattention, and obsessive, repetitive thinking during the winter, try video games. Medical research suggests that video games improve cognition and coping ability

while reducing stress and depression. Cooperative games immerse players in an online community, providing the benefits of social interaction.¹²

How much video gaming is too much? Experts vary on their answers, although some consider moderate play of 7 to 10 hours a week optimal for mental health and anything over 10 to be excessive. Most experts agree that you have to monitor yourself: if your symptoms become worse (your sleep and nutrition suffer, for example), you are playing too much.

- **Aim for Physical Lightness**

For most people, winter is the most difficult time to begin a diet, and if you are already stressed and depressed, you do not need the additional stress



of trying to lose weight. But you should be able to maintain your weight if you grab opportunities to walk outdoors or attempt to learn a winter sport, such as snowshoeing or skiing.

When carbohydrates beckon, satisfy the craving with whole grains (oatmeal for breakfast, multi-grain bread for toast). Instead of candy and sugar-loaded snacks, try fruits and vegetables, especially those with bright colors.

You may want to talk with your doctor about getting enough Vitamin D. Be careful about taking Vitamin D supplements on your own, as they may overload your system.

Conclusion

Although 2020 has brought many events that are out of our control, good health and happiness are within reach if we find the light in the darkness of winter. Light from the sun, emotional light from humor and personal connection, spiritual light from meditation and volunteering, mental light from gaming and education, and physical light from exercise and good nutrition — they all help us cope and enjoy life when winter blues or SAD threaten.

If you need additional support, reach out to a family member, friend, co-worker, or therapist who understands

your efforts — and remember that springtime always comes again.

References:

1. Seasonal Affective Disorder. Psychology Today, February 2007. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder>
2. Czeisler M.É., Lane R.I., Petrosky E., et al. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), 2020;69:1049–1057. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s_cid=mm6932a1_w
3. Robinson, L., Shubin, J., and Segal, J. Seasonal Affective Disorder. HelpGuide, August 2020. <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/seasonal-affective-disorder-sad.htm>
4. Parkinson, J. and de Castella, T. Seasonal Affective Disorder and the Difference from Winter Blues. BBC News, December 2, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30282261>
5. Seasonal Affective Disorder. Mayo Clinic, 1998–2020. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651>
6. Partonen, T. and Lönqvist, J. (1998) Seasonal Affective Disorder. Mol Diag Ther, 9, 203–212. <https://doi.org/10.2165/00023210-199809030-00004>
7. Wu, D. (2017, Jan 23). Let the Sun Shine: Mind Your Mental Health This Winter. Harvard Health Publishing. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/let-the-sun-shine-mind-your-mental-health-this-winter-2017012311058>
8. Jones, J.W. (2018, Aug 8). Decreased Perception of Color in Depression. PsychCentral. <https://psychcentral.com/news/2010/07/21/decreased-perception-of-color-in-depression/15826.html>
9. Kinsman Dean, R.A., Major, J. (2008) Humor Plays an Important Role in Healthcare Even When Patients Are Terminally Ill. Journal of Clinical Nursing, 17(8), 1088–1095. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2007.02090.x>
10. Bennet, H. (2003) Humor in Medicine Southern Medical Journal, 96(12), 1257–1261. https://www.utmb.edu/gem/pdfs/humor_in_medicine.pdf
11. Yueng, J.W.K., Zhang, Z., and Kim, T.Y. (2017) Volunteering and Health Benefits in General Adults: Cumulative Effects and Form. BMC Public Health, 17(736). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5504679/#:~:text=Likelihood%20ratio%20estimates%20of%20found%20that,decrease%20in%20depression%2C%20giving%20evidence>
12. Jones, C.M., Scholes, L., Johnson, D., et al. (2014, Mar 31) Gaming Well: Links between Videogames and Flourishing Mental Health. Frontiers in Psychology. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00260>

Jen Butler is the owner, founder, and CEO of JB Partners, a company committed to reducing stress of private-practice owners, small businesses, and large organizations through intuitive and powerful programming, one-to-one coaching, and comprehensive consulting.

While earning two bachelor's degrees - one in Public Health Administration and the other in Educational Psychology - Jen worked in hospitals, private practices, and became a paramedic, learning first-hand the challenges and relentless stress faced by medical professionals. Building on her education and 25-years of experience in learning & development, Jen Butler has worked with entrepreneurs, small business owners, corporate leaders, and executives on how to obtain sustainable profitability with less stress and more fulfillment. Jen is also a Diplomate of The American Institute of Stress. If you would like to learn more about the great programs at JB partners just go to jbpartners.com.





Ten Essential Things You Need to Know to Meditate

By James E. Porter, CEO of StressStop

To some people meditation seems difficult. To other people, easy. If you've tried it once or twice and by your own assessment, you've "failed," you may think it's incredibly difficult. If you've never tried it and I were to tell you, all you need to do is close your eyes and observe your own breathing or repeat a word or phrase, silently to yourself, it might sound incredibly easy.

One reason to meditate is that whether it's hard or easy for you, mindfulness

meditation has many health benefits. Studies have shown that a regular practice of meditation reduces stress, relieves anxiety, helps with depression, boosts your immune system, and increases happiness and contentment.¹ By reducing the activation in our amygdala (where the stress response begins) and increasing the connections between the amygdala and prefrontal cortex, these enhanced neural pathways help us react differently to stressors and respond in healthier ways to the stress we experience.

Daniel Goleman and Richard



Davidson write in their book, *Altered Traits*, “These changes are trait-like: They appear not simply during [meditation], but even in the ‘baseline’ state” [afterwards] for longer-term meditators, which supports the possibility that mindfulness changes our ability to handle stress in a better, more sustainable way.”²

How to Meditate.

So here are ten things you need to know to start meditating today.

1 Sit any way you want. You don’t have to sit cross-legged on the floor.

You can sit in a chair or sit up in bed. You can sit on the floor on a cushion. Just find a comfortable position where you can maintain the same posture for 5 to 10 minutes. You can even meditate lying down.

2 Choose your style of meditation.

You can repeat a word or phrase silently to yourself, (sometimes called, concentration meditation) or, you can focus on something that brings you into the present moment, like your breathing, or the sounds in the room (usually called, mindfulness meditation).

3 Choose what you want to focus on. You can try focusing on every in-breath, every out-breath and then the gap that occurs between the out-breath and the next in-breath, or you can quietly chant a mantra like Ohm Shanti (which means God, Peace) or you can silently repeat a calming word or phrase like peace, one, or I am feeling more and more relaxed.³

4 How to stay focused. When your mind wanders simply bring it back to whatever it is you have chosen to focus on. That's the practice of meditation. Think of it like doing reps at the gym. This practice or mental workout teaches you how to concentrate better and makes your mind stronger, and you more resilient.

5 Start small. Meditate for just five minutes first thing in the morning, or before you go to bed at night. Build your habit slowly. Eventually you can work up to 10, 15 or even 20 minutes twice a day. But for now, five minutes a day is plenty.

6 There is no such thing as a bad meditation. No matter how distracted you get, or discouraged, just keep refocusing your mind on the target, over and over. This sharpens your mind, and physically changes the brain.

7 Sleep is a by-product of meditation not the goal. If you are sleep-deprived, you may fall asleep while meditating. Meditators generally meditate sitting up, to

help prevent this from happening.

8 It doesn't have to be quiet. A quiet place is often preferred, but you can meditate anywhere: On a bus, on a plane, on a park bench, or even at the office. An important part of the practice of meditation is "non-judgment." Let go of your thoughts about the noise in the room and try to experience it directly – without thinking of it as either bad or good. It just is.

9 You don't have to close your eyes. Tibetan monks meditate with their eyes half-closed. They feel it's less distracting to focus on the floor in front of them than to close their eyes completely (which – by their way of thinking – opens up the mind to infinitely more distraction). Choose what works best for you.

10 Meditation changes the brain. Harvard Professor, Sara Lazar, has shown that eight weeks of meditating just 30 minutes a day can bring about increases in the parts of the brain that promote self-regulation, happiness and contentment (primarily the left pre-frontal cortex), while decreasing the size of certain areas of the brain that help to trigger the stress response (primarily the amygdala).

References

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwZwVIMP8Fs&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=HarvardUniversity
2. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can_meditation_lead_to_lasting_change
3. <https://lovedmeditating.com/choose-mantra-for-transcendental-meditation/>

James E. (Jim) Porter, CEO of StressStop, is author of dozens of books, workbooks, audios and videos on managing stress including *The Stress Profiler*, *Stop Stress This Minute* and *The Employee Stress Reduction and Resilience Handbook* which together have sold over 400,000 copies. Mr. Porter's latest book, *Maximizing Mindfulness* has just been released.

Mr. Porter has lectured on stress management at universities, major corporations and for government agencies including MIT, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, GlaxoSmithKline, Time Inc, The FBI, The CIA, The US NAVY and the US Army. He has presented at numerous professional conferences including EAPA, WELCOA, IRAE, National Wellness and NCEAPA. He has also appeared on *The CBS Morning News*, and his work has been reported on by *Good Morning America*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *The Associated Press*, and *The NY Daily News*. His articles on stress have been published online by *Forbes*, *HuffPost*, *Apple News*, and *Inc*.



Three Quarters of Medical Visits are Related to Stress



Now more than ever, we must learn to address stress!

Generous contributions help fund educational programs, institutional resources, research and less stressful lives.

Click here or visit
www.stress.org/give/make-a-gift
to donate today!

CONTENTMENT

Click
Here To
Subscribe
Today.

It's free, although if you agree with our mission, we are most grateful for any tax deductible donation you would like to make.

And we are not here to cause you stress so rest assured that we will never sell your email and you won't get any junk mail from us.



The American Institute of Stress
220 Adams Drive, Ste 280 - #224
Weatherford, TX 76068

info@stress.org
(682) 239-6823

The American Institute of Stress is a qualified 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.