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THE EMPLOYEE STRESS REDUCTION & RESILIENCE HANDBOOK

How to Survive and Thrive in Today's Workplace

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-James E. Porter

HOW CAN I BE MORE RESILIENT AT WORK AND LESS BOTHERED BY STRESS?

Resiliency is about mastery. It's about growth. It's about taking what we have that is already good and making it better. It's about building up those areas where we are not as strong and making them stronger. We are all resilient to some degree and no matter how resilient we are we still have our limits. We all, at some point in our lives, have to cope with stress that could overwhelm the most resilient person like dealing with the death of a loved one. And, we all have to put up with many of the "daily hassles" described in this handbook (like dealing with a difficult commute or a difficult co-worker) that even a less resilient person ought to be able to withstand but sometimes can't.

Still, no matter what our challenges are, there are many ways we can adapt to them without being defeated by them. Whether that is through the methods described in this handbook like problem-solving, mindfulness, skillful thinking, time management OR even by other methods like forgiveness, believing in a higher power or simply turning your awareness inward and listening to what your stress symptoms are trying to tell you. Whatever method you choose, the result is going to be similar.

Each path will eventually lead you to greater flexibility, greater strength, increased positivity and the ability to bounce back from adversity, all of which are hallmarks of resiliency.

As the saying goes, it's not how far you fall but how high you bounce. Resilience is about how quickly you can recover from a stressful event. Whether you trip and fall, or rise to the occasion, it doesn't matter. Either way, you can still achieve resilience by focusing on what you learned from that event, what you gained from it, and how you can avoid falling into the same trap in the future. It's NOT about avoiding the inevitable blows of life, but about how quickly you can get yourself up off the mat and back on your feet.

Resiliency is not about being completely immune to stress either. It's about persevering in the face of it. You don't have to pretend that your stress doesn't bother you: *Far from it.* What you need to do is face it, embrace it, and let it mold you into something greater than you were before you experienced the stress.

In this handbook, we have covered as many ways of promoting resilience and reducing stress as we could fit into 32 pages. From living life according to your most important values to learning how to say no without offending anyone, these simple approaches will really work to boost your resilience overall. The idea is to take whatever works for YOU from this handbook and incorporate it into your daily life so that you not only learn how to MANAGE your stress, *you learn how to thrive under it too.*

RESILIENCY TIP:

Finding out what you're really passionate about, living every day with an attitude of gratitude, becoming more altruistic, letting go of slights (forgiveness), and accepting the roles and boundaries of one's job description are surprisingly effective ways to increase your resilience.

DEALING WITH A TOUGH CUSTOMER OR CLIENT

CUSTOMERS GET STRESSED...

When customers get stressed about the product or service you provide they generally want to take it out on you. But interestingly, the customer's stress may have little to do with you and little to do with the product or service you provide and it may be more about how they are feeling on that particular day.

Rather than viewing your customer as being difficult or demanding, try thinking of him or her as someone who is having a really bad day. Generally when WE are stressed we want someone to listen, validate our concerns and help us solve the problem that is upsetting us. And this is exactly how you can help your customer lower his or her stress.

Read the five tips on the next page and try any one of these techniques the next time you are dealing with a difficult customer. See your interaction with this stressed-out customer as an opportunity to help them manage THEIR stress, and by so doing, helping your company acquire a customer.

The customer's stress may have little to do with you or the product or service you provide.

8 WARNING SIGNS THAT A CLIENT OR CUSTOMER IS HAVING A BAD DAY

1. Irrational statements that make little or no sense.
2. Exaggerated claims that don't sound true.
3. Lack of eye contact.
4. Flushed face.
5. Your own internal feelings of discomfort; even before the customer starts getting angry.
6. Use of profanity.
7. Increasing use of hand gestures.
8. Blaming you (or the company) for things you had little or nothing to do with.

HOW TO TURN A TOUGH CUSTOMER INTO A LOYAL CUSTOMER

1 Breathe. While your customer's stress is going up, you can keep yours down by simply noticing your breathing. As much as you can—even while your customer is carrying on—just notice your own breathing.

2 Listen. Letting the customer blow off a little steam, reassuring them that you're listening intently (I understand, Sir; I can see how you would feel that way, I might have done the same thing if I were you) and letting them complain unchallenged will eventually allow their stressed-out energy to dissipate. When you feel like it's time to speak, wait a second or two before starting.

3 Sympathize. Try to remember a time when YOU lodged a customer complaint and maybe even lost your temper a bit, too. By doing this simple mental exercise, you'll be able to relate to your customer and react with empathy, and empathy can help you transform the customer's stress energy into something more positive.

4 Apologize. There's a sign in the lobby of Stew Leonard's in Norwalk, Connecticut, the world's largest dairy store, that is literally written in stone. It's carved into a giant granite rock. It says:

RULE #1 The customer is always right.

RULE #2 If the customer is ever wrong, reread rule #1.

One of the reasons this store got to be world's largest, is because the owner, Stew Leonard, realized it is much more important to give in to a customer's modest demands than quibble over something that might result in losing that customer. So sometimes it's good business to apologize, and give in to the modest demand -even if you feel like the customer doesn't deserve an apology or a small refund or an exchange for something new.

5 Don't take it personally. Customers just want a chance to vent their stress. If you find you DO take it personally, refer back to rule #1: Breathe!

RESILIENCY TIP:

Don't catch second-hand stress from your customers and clients. Keep reminding yourself: This is their stress and not yours.

DEALING WITH A CHALLENGING CO-WORKER

Co-workers can say mean things. They can be rude, moody, angry, and have annoying habits. *It's predictable as rain, right?* And yet, when a co-worker is mean to us we act surprised and stressed and as if this stressful interaction *shouldn't* be happening.

day you will often arrive home tired and crabby and not even know why. Now that you are aware of this phenomenon, where you have to act like things don't bother you, you still have to make a decision.

This differential between how we know people ARE and how we want them to BE is part of the problem. We know that people can be difficult at times. We know that WE can be difficult at times. But we maintain the view that it's NOT OK when people, *particularly* co-workers, are difficult with us.

So how do we reconcile these opposing positions? To some extent, a business environment is like a big family. You see the same people day after day. You spend more time with some co-workers than you do with certain members of your own family. We know there is friction in families and yet we want ALL our business relationships to be cordial, polite and free of stress or conflict.

Occupational stress experts say that this need to keep up appearances at work can be truly exhausting: In other words, when conflicts and difficulties arise, *you have to act like it doesn't bother you*. When you wind up having to do this all

What are you going to do about it? This is the point where problems break down into two categories. The problems that you have to deal with yourself, and the problems you have to take to HR. Read the article on the facing page to find out how to deal with the problems you can cope with yourself, and check the box below for the problems you should consider taking to HR (or, someone in your company who handles worker complaints).

6 WARNING SIGNS YOU SHOULD TAKE YOUR PROBLEM TO HUMAN RESOURCES (HR)

1. Feeling like you are being bullied.
2. Feeling like you have been threatened in any way.
3. Co-worker is being verbally abusive.
4. A witness confirms your feelings.
5. Anything with sexual content or even sexual overtones.
6. Use of profanity.

RESILIENCY TIP:

Find someone who ISN'T bothered by the same co-worker that bothers you and ask them: *why aren't you bothered by this person?* What you learn may teach you a lot about managing stress.

“We know there is conflict in families and yet we want our business relationships to be free of conflict. This isn't always a realistic expectation.”

HOW TO GET ALONG WELL WITH YOUR CO-WORKERS

1 Avoid the blame game. Blaming other people for the bad things that happen to you leaves you feeling helpless and out of control. When you get in the habit of blaming others, you will find that you are suddenly working with a lot more “difficult people” than you ever were before. When you feel the urge to lay on the blame, step back and try to determine what YOUR role in this situation might have been. Take responsibility for the aspects of the situation that are under your control. Watch how this dramatically reduces the number of difficult people you work with in the future.

2 Accept that people are different. Most human beings have very little tolerance for even the minor personality differences that occur between two people. It’s often this *intolerance* that turns normal co-workers into difficult co-workers. If we want to live and work in harmony with all types of people we need to begin to see the importance of diversity, not only from the perspective of racial differences, but from the perspective of personality differences too. Obviously, we need BOTH accountants AND creative types to make a business run. And yet when someone is a nitpicker (an accountant type) or always running late (a creative type) it drives us crazy if we’re the OTHER type.

3 Give people a free pass. Everyone deserves a free pass now and then for being grumpy or rude or annoying. Everyone, including you, occasionally has a bad day, and when you see it in this perspective, you are the one who will benefit.

4 Manage your own stress. Remember, your stress levels play into every negative interaction you have with another human being. If you know your stress is high, and you are having problems getting along with someone, think about the outlets you can find for managing it. Exercise, meditation, deep breathing, yoga, massage, listening to relaxing music and reading something inspirational are all outlets for coping with stress.

5 Offer to help the person you are having trouble with. Doing the opposite of what your emotions are telling you to do is sometimes the absolute best way to bring those emotions under control. If someone is bugging you, spend some time talking to them, have lunch with them or offer to help them. Simple gestures like these can completely short-circuit a stressful situation.

6 If all else fails, let someone else do your police work. If you do need to address a problem that doesn’t go away with the above methods, let someone else do the enforcing. That’s why we have hierarchies at work to deal with problems that won’t go away even after you’ve tried not to blame, applied tolerance, given them a free pass and managed your own stress. When all these efforts fail, carefully document what is happening to you, noting times, language used and your efforts to avoid any trouble. Bring these complaints (in writing) to the management and let THEM decide how to deal with it.

HOW TO WORK WELL WITH YOUR BOSS

Time pressure, cutthroat competition, economic pressure and even your boss's boss can all contribute to the stress of work, and your working relationship with *your* boss. Still the more you know about how to get along with your supervisor, the better your relationship will be.

Probably the thing we crave most in any job is a sense of autonomy. Having autonomy means more control and having more control often means having less stress. We all want our bosses to trust us to make decisions that allow us to function semi-independently most of the time. This is very much in the interest of your boss, too.

But there's a catch.

You have to earn this trust by showing that you can work independently and even think like him or her in certain

situations. Here's five ideas for how to earn more autonomy:

1. **Volunteer to do an assignment nobody else wants.**
2. **Always ask for a deadline.** When do you want this by?
3. **If the deadline is unrealistic, negotiate:** I think I'm going to need x number of days to get this done.
4. **Get the work done on time or even a bit early.**
5. **Check with your boss midstream.** See if you are doing the work correctly.

RESILIENCY TIP:

There are always going to be **SOME** difficult moments with your boss no matter how good a boss you have. Resist the urge to constantly relive these moments. Let them go. Try to start each day with a clean slate.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD BOSS

A good teacher. Doesn't mind sharing what he or she has learned and is good at explaining things.

Gives recognition. Acknowledges good work and gives you good feedback when the work needs to be better.

Encourages risk taking. Is willing to accept occasional mistakes in order to encourage self-sufficiency.

Ethical. Sets the highest standard in this regard and expects the same of you.

Encourages suggestions. Asks for feedback from employees; builds team spirit.

Defends your rights. A GOOD supervisor realizes that he or she is part of a larger team and must defend the rights of his or her team members to higher level management.

Understands the importance of family. No matter how busy it gets, this boss fully realizes there are many times when you have to put family ahead of the goals of the company.

Doesn't MAKE you work overtime. Too much overtime and/or bringing work home eventually takes its toll. A good boss will often leave this decision up to you.

High EQ (Emotional Intelligence). A good boss doesn't blow his or her top, use curse words or is verbally abusive, *ever*. Knows how to control his or her emotions and is a good communicator.

HOW TO GET ALONG WITH YOUR TYPE OF BOSS

The micro-manager. Yes, this boss checks your work probably more than is necessary and wants to get involved in every decision, no matter how small. So find a way to use this trait to YOUR advantage. Whenever you have a stopping place, run your work by this boss and share your decision making process, to see if he or she agrees before continuing on. Don't resist this trait. Flow with it and let him or her help you make your work even better. When you deliver the final product everyone will be happy with the result.

The silent type. Take the initiative and talk to your boss. Ask directly what's expected of you and how you're doing. Take advantage of both formal (at work) and informal (after work) opportunities to get to know him or her better. Make a list of things you believe you ought to be working on and see if he or she agrees. Better yet, let him or her prioritize the list for you.

The minimal-manager. This boss is the opposite of the micro-manager. You have a certain freedom with this boss that you won't find with the other types so use it. He or she may not be looking over your shoulder or breathing down your neck, so you want to make sure your goals are in alignment.

Once you know exactly what you should be working on, you now have the freedom to do this job on your own terms. Whenever you can, work to your strengths on tasks you enjoy doing and by getting recognized for doing good work you will eventually do less and less of the work that you find tedious and more and more of the work that you find satisfying.

The perfectionist. This boss probably thinks more highly of you than you realize but may never say so. Get to know what this boss likes and dislikes by allowing him or her to check your work on a regular basis, particularly when you first start working for him or her. Once you get to know the things that absolutely HAVE to be perfect, it becomes much easier to work with this kind of boss. Even though this boss will seem overly critical, don't take it personally and use these criticisms to take your work to an even higher level.

Your boss is human too. We all have preconceived notions of what a good boss should be: a supportive, kind, parental figure who uses gentle prodding whenever necessary. But is there anyone who lives up to this description all the time? Probably not even your own parents! Try making a list of how your ideal boss would treat you and then honestly ask yourself if YOU could be the person you want your boss to be, day in and day out. If the answer is no, maybe you need to lower your unrealistic expectations.

WORK

LIFE

WORK-LIFE BALANCE: FINDING PURPOSE AND MEANING

There's nothing quite as stressful as having to choose between work and family: To go to work when there's a big deadline or stay home with a sick child, to stay past quitting time or leave a few minutes early to visit an elderly parent, to put your baby in daycare or take an extended maternity leave, to stay late and get one more thing done or be late for dinner with a friend or spouse, to attend that important meeting or miss your child's (or even your niece or nephew's) starring role in the school play or soccer game. These are just some of the stressful work/family conflicts that arise every day. Learning how to handle conflict well is one of the hallmarks of a resilient person.

A lot of these tough decisions are going to be made according to your most important values whether you realize what those values are or not. Some people are more likely to decide in favor of family and some people are more likely to decide in favor of work. But don't jump to the conclusion that one choice is wrong and another choice is right. It all depends on what you *value most*.

So how do we lead a balanced life? Any stay-at-home mom or stay-at-home dad will tell you that preparing the meals, doing the dishes, buying the groceries, changing diapers, doing the laundry and cleaning the house all day is no walk

in the park! And it's certainly not a balanced life, either. Many of the people filling these roles would jump at the chance to go on a business trip, eat out for lunch on occasion, attend meetings, wear nice clothing, or just have a reason to get out of the house every day and GET PAID FOR DOING IT.

On the other hand, no one wants to miss their baby's first steps, miss seeing a school play, or even miss the memorial service of a beloved aunt. And sometimes these moments are reserved for the stay-at-home parent, or someone who only works part time. Let's face it, in this day and age, we want it all! And that being the case, we are just going to have to learn how to deal with work/family conflict.

The more conflicts you have, the more interesting your life is going to be: Because what it's really saying is that you have choices to make, sometimes hard choices, but choices, none-the-less. The trick is to make these choices in a way that supports your true values. Take a look at the list below and see if the tough choices that you've had to make reflect what's most important to you.

RESILIENCY TIP:

How would your life be different if you put peace of mind or stress management as your highest value? Would you be a better worker? Would your family like you more? Would you carry the same level of debt?

WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT YOU VALUE MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE?

- | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|----------|
| Wealth | Alone time | Fame | Fun | Family | Exercise |
| Integrity | Socializing | Religion | Parents | God | Wisdom |
| Education | Beauty | Health | Kindness | Happiness | Success |
| Hobbies | Accomplishment | Career | Appearance | Friends | |
| Children | Stress Management | Peace of mind | Helping others | Driving a new car | |

Be honest with yourself about what you actually value vs. what you think you "should" value. See box on the next page.

HOW TO LEAD A MORE BALANCED LIFE

1 Keep ONE calendar of everything that's important in your life. We often keep one calendar for personal events and another calendar for business appointments, or if we keep it all on an electronic device, we are not always diligent about jotting down important family events. Be extra careful to add occasions like birthdays, school plays, and graduations to your calendar whenever you first hear about them. If someone asks you to do something work-related, always respond by saying: "Let me check my calendar and get back to you." This can help you avoid a large percentage of the work-family conflicts that do arise.

2 Analyze the conflict. Is this a one-time conflict or does it recur on a regular basis? If it recurs, find a way to eliminate it from EVER recurring again. Let's say you usually work on the weekends, but you always decide at the last minute exactly when this is going to take place. The family wants you to participate in an event, but you opt to work instead and this causes conflict. So that there's no recurring conflict, announce to your family that Saturday mornings, or Sunday afternoons (or whatever time is best), are set aside for work. Whether you go into your place of business or do that work from home, let everyone know that this is YOUR work time and that family events should be scheduled around it. By scheduling your work ahead of time, even on weekends, these predictable, recurring areas of conflict will be eliminated.

3 Call a friend. If a conflict does arise (and it's big enough) get some advice from a trusted friend who is not a part of the conflict. Choose a friend who understands the circumstances. Your single friends may not understand work-family conflicts: call someone who has handled similar situations. Choose a good listener. Just giving you the opportunity to sort it all out in your head may be exactly what you need to resolve the conflict in a peaceful way.

4 Volunteer to finish the job at home (if you can) or come in early the next morning. If it's your responsibility to see that a job gets done at work, and for some reason a family conflict is calling you home, volunteer to come in early the next morning, or take the work home with you. Unless you commonly work out of your home, don't make a habit of taking work home, but if it resolves a crisis or conflict, it's certainly worth trying.

5 Incorporate your values into every decision. We all value different things. Some people value family, some religion, some integrity, some people value wealth or fame. What you hold near and dear to your heart is very personal. But when your work life runs counter to your values, you are going to experience conflict and stress every day (like a vegetarian working in a meat-packing plant). Once you decide what your true values really are (see below) be bold. Intentionally make life decisions based on your most important values.

WHAT DO YOU VALUE? (Choose from the list on the previous page or add in your own values.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now list your top five values, thinking carefully about what are your most important and next most important values. Obviously, a person who values success over family is going to be a very different person from someone who values family over success.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now think about what you actually value vs. what you think you SHOULD value. If someone followed you around and watched what you DO for a week what would they think you value most?