

10 Creative Tips to Exchange Stress for Success

Jesus told us that we would face all kinds of pressures in life. And He promised to be with us and bring us through every challenge.

We've all heard that it's important to stay focused.

What we don't hear much about is how to protect our focus and make consistent progress in the face of stress and overwhelm.

Stress is one of the giants that shows up to stop us along the path to more of what we want in life and work. There is no detour or side street, but we can courageously choose our response to stress, overcome every challenge and boldly find a way forward with God's peace, perspective and provision.

Seeing Stress Differently

Most of what we hear about stress is negative.

Yes, it's true, stress can wreck our health, relationships and life. But stress can also be a catalyst that sharpens our focus and propels us to higher levels of success.

I like to think of stress as a signal alerting me to a needed change or important opportunity, challenge, decision or learning.

You see, it's not the stress, pressure or challenge standing in the way that derails us. It's our response to it that matters most.

Everyone experiences some level of stress in life and work.

The difference is that successful people learn to expand their capacity to choose a more resourceful response in stressful

situations, adjust their strategy, protect their focus and keep moving forward.

You can too.

What is stress?

Stress is simply our bodies' way of responding to a demand.

It's a signal that says, "Pay attention!"

The feelings of stress we experience, according to medical science, are a result of hormones like Adrenaline, Cortisol and Norepinephrine released inside our bodies. These are very powerful chemicals.

You've probably heard stories about mothers picking up cars to free their children in an emergency. Their superhuman strength is a result of adrenaline and other chemicals rushing through their bodies. There's likely an Angel involved too, and the surge of physical strength these mothers experience is very real. It's just like what happens when a soldier manages to walk three miles to safety after being critically wounded on the battlefield.

These stress hormones can save our lives, but they can also destroy our health in daily life. Imagine getting into your car, slamming down on the gas pedal and holding your foot there for days. What do you think is going to happen to the engine?

The Mayo Clinic tells us that living in a constant state of stress can disrupt the processes in our bodies and increase the risk of numerous health problems like anxiety, depression, headaches, sleep problems, weight gain and more.

But this is not a science lesson; this is about understanding what stress is and how to choose your response to it in your life and work.

Stress, Focus and Success

Have you ever heard the saying “New levels, new devils”?

It reflects the observation that at each new level of success, there are bigger and bigger problems, pressures, challenges and opportunities.

No doubt there are increased levels of spiritual resistance along the path to God’s best for you. But often the greatest source of resistance, and what holds us back, is our own thinking and patterns of behavior.

One success coach explains it this way:

Every human being develops a series of beliefs, values, rules, mental maps, strategies and habitual patterns for navigating life. We learn how to deal with challenges and problems in a certain way to keep ourselves safe.

Our beliefs filter how we see and respond to life; our values influence what we prioritize, and our patterns of behavior often become our first response to something new or different.

When life happens, we make a decision about what it means. These decisions can work for and against us. If we’re David facing Goliath, we draw courage and strategy from a victorious reference. We run confidently into battle and win on our terms.

But if we get rejected or fail and decide it’s because we’re not good enough, we retreat into fear, shut down and become stopped or stuck.

Our decision about what rejection, failure or anything else means can become a limiting belief that negatively influences how we see and respond to daily life and work.

The stress that accompanies any new challenge or opportunity is simply the trigger that brings out what's inside us.

The good news is that we are not robots. We can recondition ourselves to think differently, take charge and choose a better response.

This doesn't eliminate problems or stressful situations, but it can dramatically alter the outcomes we experience.

How?

10 Keys to Less Stress, More Success

Here are 10 keys to help:

1. Win the battle in advance.

Every battle is won or lost before it begins.

It's true in war, and it's true in life.

Jesus gives us a "heads-up" in John 16:33. He tells us in advance that we're going face trouble so that we can confidently choose our response and proceed in the knowledge of His victory and in the peace and power that come from His perspective and wisdom.

Jesus' victory is a spiritual truth that is also very practical, but His promises don't automatically manifest in daily life. We must consciously choose to believe. Then, we must live a life where our daily choices are evidence of our faith.

Imagine this truth as an invisible garment you can put on each day that gives you superpowers. Then, learn to build with God daily and never surrender to anything less than His purpose, promise, and victory in all of life.

How we see the past influences our future.

One of the exercises we do in Prayer-Plan Your Life is create a timeline of significant experiences and turning points where things changed. The goal is to see whatever happened through God's eyes.

When we see the toughest times of our lives through the lenses of God's redemptive love and faithful provision, we can respond differently when we face challenges in the future. We also make bigger plans.

Building ourselves up in the truth of who Jesus is in all of life helps us to deal confidently with whatever we will face in advance. We see and believe ourselves victorious. And we ultimately win in every situation because He has already won for us and promises to win with us today.

2. Expect favor and blessing.

What you see, hear and say most is what you believe and do.

Proverbs 4:23 tells us to guard our hearts because everything we do flows from it. Stop letting negative news, gossip and the noise of life be the dominate your mental diet. Take charge of what you see and hear.

Give yourself the gift of a directed mind, and a heart flowing with love and a positive expectation for good.

Describe in a sentence or two who you know in your heart God is calling you to be. Write it in a letter to God telling Him you want to go for it. Read your letter out loud every morning. Ask God to bless you with more understanding of how to live according to your calling. (I even place mine under my pillow at night keeping these thoughts close.) When stress comes, take a few minutes to refocus, read your letter, and charge ahead!

Here are a few other ideas:

- Begin each day with prayer, meditating on the promises

of God.

- Identify at least 10 promise Scriptures for your life. Write them on index cards or sticky notes. Review and proclaim them over your life and work daily. Ask God for insight and understanding. Boldly confront every problem or challenge with the certainty of victory and practical wisdom for success.
- Create a “playlist” of music and teachings available when you commute or have waiting time.
- Politely refuse to engage in gossip and other negative conversations.
- End each day by documenting your progress and what you learned.

3. Ask empowering questions.

Questions are a powerful tool of focus that can defeat stress.

When life happens, most people respond by asking some form of the following question: “Why does this always happen to me?”

Instead, when facing a stressful or challenging situation, ask different questions:

“What if this will work?”

“What’s the way forward?”

“What’s the most important thing I can do or learn right now?”

“What could be great about this?”

4. Learn what you need to know.

There’s a learning curve in anything you want to do.

Building the plane after you’ve already jumped off the cliff can be stressful. But you don’t have to go it alone.

Invest whatever it takes to get the information and coaching you need.

What are your top three personal and professional goals?

What must you know and do to achieve your goals?

Who has successfully done what you want to do?

What are the top 10 questions you want them to answer?

5. Keep you eyes on the prize.

There are so many deadlines staring me in the face as I type this blog post. I've got a venue to land for our annual conference and a course to record next week for TrueTribe members.

It feels overwhelming.

And then I pause to think of the people who will be encouraged when I press publish, the hundreds of lives that will be refreshed and practically equipped at the conference, and how my new course will help people make better decisions now that will count for eternity.

Then, I get a surge of determination and energy that makes me invincible to the nagging stress.

It's important to get clear about what you want and why.

The reason we invest significant time helping you to clarify this in *Find Your Why Forward* is because when you have a compelling why, you're in a better position to handle the stress of how.

6. Strengthen your mental muscle.

The ability to respond resourcefully to stress and stay focused in an avalanche of distraction is a mental muscle you must develop.

One of the ways you can do this is through prayer and meditation.

Beyond the obvious benefits, science tells us that prayer and biblical meditation help to recalibrate our brains and expand our capacity to respond to life in resourceful ways.

Breathing exercises, brain games, getting enough sleep, and proper nutrition and supplementation also help.

7. Eat the frog.

“Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.”—Mark Twain

Your “frog” can be defined as your biggest, most important task.

Too often our response to stress and overcome is to procrastinate.

Ask yourself: “What’s the most important thing to complete right now?” Then get it done. Completion is a powerful energizer.

Invest time to learn productivity hacks and tools to help you get more of the right things done in less time.

8. Protect your focus.

Nothing can stop or defeat you until it breaks your focus.

God created us to dwell with Him and to build with Him. He provides a way for us to be focused and fruitful in the crush of business demands, relationship tension and the everyday challenges of life and work

When you believe this deep in your soul, you will become fierce in the management of your focus and slay the giants of distraction.

The truth is, all distractions are equal. They stop you.

You must decide that no matter what happens, you will find a way to keep moving forward—even if it means waking up an hour earlier in the morning or having hard conversations with others.

One simple question to ask yourself is this: When I'm at my best, what's true? The answer to this question will help you identify insight and understanding about what focus looks like for you.

Focus and the momentum that comes from it are a formidable force that make you extremely productive.

Protecting your focus allows you to navigate confidently through the minefields of past problems, cranky bosses, nutty customers and messy situations, and it allows you to blaze a trail to success that is energizing, rewarding and true to your God-inspired values and vision.

9. Choose and create supportive environments.

What's around you determines what grows inside you.

Every environment has a purpose and a product.

Different environments support different levels of focus, productivity and connection. For example, don't try to do work that requires high levels of concentration in an environment filled with distractions. And the local coffee shop may be an ideal place for meetings.

Begin with your home and office.

Clean up and clear out the clutter.

Choose a specific place in your home to meet God.

Decide a place to write or do creative work.

Put your mobile phone in airplane mode, turn off notifications.

Have an agreement with others around you to minimize interruptions. You must train people to respect your focus or they never will.

10. Schedule times to rest, relax and renew.

Studies show that taking time off can help you be more productive at work. But more and more people are putting off vacation time.

Why?

Studies show that there are three primary reasons: (a) they don't think they can afford it, (b) the fear of returning to a mountain of work, and (c) they don't think anyone else can do their job.

Don't let these be your excuse.

Get creative. Learn to use points and miles to travel inexpensively. Plan and prepare for time off. Don't let fear or pressure to conform to a workaholic culture rob you of the blessing of rest and renewal.

"I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back" (Phil. 3:12-14, MSG). {eoa}

Linda Fields is the founder and CEO of 7M-pact (), the marketplace ministry expression for the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, and beyond. Sharing insights from over 30 years of corporate training and teaching university business classes, Field speaks, consults and coaches individuals to lead well. She is the author of IMPACT Your Sphere of INFLUENCE: Bringing God's Presence in the

Workplace, Find Your Why Forward *and other resources.*