

Work / Life

Stress Is an
Imbalance Between
Silence and Activity

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NAVIGATOR

Earlier this month I did something I've never done before. I attended a 5-day silent retreat. Although I'd been to weekend retreats, I was curious to see what it would be like to be quiet and out of touch with the "real world" for a longer period of time. Well, I wish I could tell you that it was a blissful and relaxing experience; however, it was a little more complicated than that.

The first two days of the retreat were difficult. As I settled into my room, my mind wrapped itself around anything it could find to worry about. What if I couldn't stand the silence for a full 5 days? What if something came up at the office that really needed my attention? Did I remember to water the plants before I left? Then, as my mind got bored with these mental gymnastics, it directed its attention closer to home—me. I thought about the things I didn't like—my lack of patience, or the fact that when I get scared I lose faith too quickly.

By the third day, I was ready to scream! Then, something interesting happened. As I surrendered to the reality that the retreat wasn't going to be the wonderful, relaxing experience I had imagined, my mind started to settle down. Instead of judging myself (and my thoughts), I gave up the fight and just let them pass. And in this place of surrender, I started to feel moments of peace.

In spite of the rocky start to my retreat, I learned something very important. Silence is the key to restoring a sense of balance to our lives. It replenishes our physical energy. It

calms the mind. And it gives us a chance to connect more deeply with our soul. From this deeper place we have the opportunity to stop and consider whether or not we're living the life we truly want to live.

Now, I'm sure some of you are thinking, "But you don't understand. I have kids to deal with, a demanding job, or extenuating circumstances that require my attention." While I know how challenging life can be, my reaction is this: All the more reason to balance your busy life with silence. After all, the more difficult your circumstances, the more your brain and nervous system need a rest. And, from a well-rested place, you'll be far more effective at handling your responsibilities.

To get a feel for what I mean, try an experiment this week. At the moment you start to feel any stress or tension, use silence as an immediate remedy. For example, if things get crazy at work, shut your office door, turn the ringer off on the phone, and sit with your eyes closed for 10 minutes. Or, if the children are getting too rambunctious, send them outside to play and sit quietly in the living room by yourself. If you're home alone with the kids, see if you can trade a little babysitting time with a neighborhood mom or dad. I'm sure there are other parents who could use a break too!

If, when sitting in silence, your mind gets overactive, try this: breathe slowly in through your nose to a count of six, hold your breath to a count of six, and exhale slowly through your mouth to a count of six. This should

slow your physiology down and make it a bit easier to relax. As you practice tackling stress with silence during the week, don't worry if you're not able to notice a difference right away. Just like my experience during the silent retreat, it may take some time to find your moments of peace.

Finally, I know from reading our community boards that many of you are currently faced with challenging life circumstances. Of course, during this difficult time in the world, we're all feeling some form of anxiety in one way or another. During the retreat, our facilitator shared a definition of stress that I really liked. He said: "Stress is not caused by your busy life, it's simply the result of an imbalance between silence and activity." This simple yet profound statement really hit home. Seen from this perspective, silence is the first bit of medicine we need to take when we're feeling overwhelmed and looking for some relief. Whether you start with 1 minute or 10, I encourage you to use this powerful tool to your advantage!

Print out the following statement and keep it nearby to remind you to use silence as your personal stress buster:

"My life flows effortlessly when I balance silence with activity."

(Source: Cheryl Richardson, personal coach, lecturer and author, in "Life Makeover For The Year 2003," <http://www@cherylrichardson.com>)

WEB SITE PICKS

<http://www.fuelcostcalculator.com/>

Fuel Cost Calculator: Cost of Gas for Your Car, Point A to Point B

INSPIRATION

I Tried To Climb the Mountain Today

I tried to climb the mountain today. As I inched my way up the path, I felt overwhelmed, so I had to turn back.

I tried to climb the mountain today. On my journey, darkness started to fall, and I was full of fear, so I had to return to a safe place.

I was ready to climb the mountain today. But it was so hot outside, I thought I better stay in my nice air-conditioned house and rest up for tomorrow's attempt.

I was about to climb the mountain today. But I had so many other things to do, so instead of climbing the mountain, I took care of much more important tasks. I washed my car, mowed the grass, and watched the big game. Today, the mountain will just have to wait.

I was going to climb the mountain today. But as I stared at the mountain in its majestic beauty, I knew I stood no chance of making it to the top, so I figured, why even bother trying?

I had forgotten about climbing the mountain today until a friend came by and asked me what I was up to lately. I told him I was thinking about climbing that mountain someday. I went on and on about how I was going to accomplish this task.

Finally, he said, "I just got back from climbing the mountain. For the longest time I told myself I was trying to climb the mountain but never made any progress. I almost let the dream of making it to the top die. I came up with every excuse of why I could not make it up the mountain, but never once did I give myself a reason why I could. One day, as I stared at the mountain and pondered, I realized that if I didn't make an attempt at this dream, all my dreams would eventually die.

"The next morning, I started my climb." He continued, "It was not easy, and at times I wanted to quit. But no matter what I faced, I placed one foot in front of the other, keeping a steady pace. When the wind tried to blow me over the edge, I kept walking. When the voices inside my head screamed, 'Stop!' I focused on my goal never letting it out of sight, and I kept moving forward. At times, I was ready to quit, but I knew I had come too far. Time and time again, I reassured myself

that I was going to finish this journey. I struggled to make it to the top, but I climbed the mountain!

"I have to be going," my friend said. "Tomorrow is a new day to accomplish more dreams. By the way, what are you going to do tomorrow?"

I looked at him, with intensity and confidence in my eyes, and said, "I have a mountain to climb."

(Source: Gary Barnes, © 1999, courtesy of <http://www.homeholidaysfamilyandfun.com>)

HEALTH TIP

Artificial Sweeteners Intensify the Kick of Alcohol

Australian researchers recently uncovered one more reason you should stay away from soft drinks—specifically those of the diet variety spiked with artificial sweeteners—and energy drinks when you are also consuming **any kind of alcohol**.

Artificially sweetened drinks contaminated with Splenda and aspartame, like Diet Coke and Red Bull, concentrate and elevate the amount of alcohol absorption in the body, resulting in higher blood alcohol levels, **by emptying the stomach faster**.

Using ultrasound technology, scientists tested their theory on eight subjects who consumed a drink made from vodka and a sugar-sweetened orange drink one day and the same amount of alcohol with a diet soft drink the next. Stomachs held onto the beverage mixed with a diet drink **about 6 minutes less** than those sweetened with a regular soda.

Perhaps it's the combination of alcohol, artificial sweeteners, and caffeine that makes all the difference. In any event, you're far better off avoiding alcohol altogether, despite the debatable benefits, and soft drinks of all kinds, and sticking to **pure, fresh water**.

(Source: <http://www.mercola.com>, from MSNBC, May 23, 2006)

HUMOR

Computer Help Desk

Help Desk: What kind of computer do you have?

Customer: A white one

Customer: Hi, this is Celine. I can't get my diskette out.

Help Desk: Have you tried pushing the button?

Customer: Yes, sure, it's really stuck.

Help Desk: That doesn't sound good; I'll make a note.

Customer: No . . . wait a minute . . . I hadn't inserted it yet . . . it's still on my desk . . . sorry

Help Desk: Click on the "My Computer" icon on to the left of the screen.

Customer: Your left or my left?

Help Desk: Good day. How may I help you?

Customer: Hello . . . I can't print.

Help Desk: Would you click on "Start" for me and—

Customer: Listen, pal, don't start getting technical on me! I'm not Bill Gates!

Customer: Hi, good afternoon, this is Martha, I can't print. Every time I try, it says "Can't find printer." I've even lifted the printer and placed it in front of the monitor, but the computer still says it can't find it

Customer: I have problems printing in red.

Help Desk: Do you have a color printer?

Customer: Aaaaah Thank you.

Help Desk: What's on your monitor now, ma'am?

Customer: A teddy bear my boyfriend bought for me in the supermarket.

Customer: My keyboard is not working anymore.

Help Desk: Are you sure it's plugged into the computer?

Customer: No. I can't get behind the computer.

Help Desk: Pick up your keyboard and walk 10 paces back.

Customer: Okay.

Help Desk: Did the keyboard come with you?

Customer: Yes.

Help Desk: That means the keyboard is not plugged in. Is there another keyboard?

Customer: Yes, there's another one here. Ah . . . that one does work!

Help Desk: Your password is the small letter "a" as in apple, a capital letter "V" as in Victor, and the number "7."

Customer: Is that "7" in capital letters?

A customer couldn't get on the Internet:

Help Desk: Are you sure you used the right password?

Customer: Yes, I'm sure. I saw my colleague do it.

Help Desk: Can you tell me what the password was?

Customer: Five stars.

Help Desk: What antivirus program do you use?

Customer: Netscape.

Help Desk: That's not an antivirus program.

Customer: Oh, sorry . . . Internet Explorer.



Customer: I have a huge problem. A friend has put a screen saver on my computer, but every time I move the mouse, it disappears!

Help Desk: How may I help you?

Customer: I'm writing my first e-mail.

Help Desk: Okay, and what seems to be the problem?

Customer: Well, I have the letter "a" in the address, but how do I get the circle around it?

(Courtesy of <http://www.homeholidaysfamilyandfun.com>)

HEALTH TIP

Twenty-three Tips for Keeping the House Cool

Puzzling out how to keep your house as cool as possible during these hot summer months? Trying to remember the conventional wisdom but not quite sure how it goes? Those window fans, for example, should they be placed to draw air in or out? Upwind or downwind of the dwelling? And what about windows, shades, and awnings? Are windows on the north side of the house better left closed or open during the day? Are awnings better than shades?

1. Reduce the cooling load by employing cost-effective conservation measures. Provide effective shade for east and west windows. When possible, delay heat-generating activities such as dishwashing until evening on hot days.

2. Over most of the cooling season, keep the house closed tight during the day. Don't let in unwanted heat and humidity. Ventilate at night, either naturally or with fans.

3. You can help get rid of unwanted heat through ventilation if the temperature of the incoming air is 77 °F or lower. (This strategy works most effectively at night and on cooler days.) Window fans for ventilation are a good option if used properly. They should be located on the downwind side of the house facing out. A window should be open in each room. Interior doors must remain open to allow airflow.

4. Use ceiling fans to increase comfort levels at higher thermostat settings. The standard human comfort range for light clothing in the summer is between 72 °F and 78 °F. To extend the comfort range to 82 °F, you need a breeze of about 2.5 ft/sec or 1.7 mph. A slow-turning, ceiling-mounted paddle fan can easily provide this airflow.

5. In hot climates, plant shade trees around the house. Don't plant trees on the south side if you want to benefit from passive solar heating in the winter.

6. If you have an older central air-conditioner, consider replacing the outdoor compressor with a modern, high-efficiency unit. Make sure that it is properly matched to the indoor unit.

7. If buying a new air-conditioner, be sure that it is properly sized. Get assistance from an energy auditor or air-conditioning contractor.

8. Buy a high-efficiency air-conditioner. For room air-conditioners, the energy efficiency ratio (EER) rating should be above 10; for central air-conditioners, look for a seasonal energy efficiency ratio (SEER) rating above 12.

9. In hot, humid climates, make sure that the air-conditioner you buy will adequately get rid of high humidity. Models with variable or multispeed blowers are generally best. Try to keep moisture sources out of the house.

10. Try not to use a dehumidifier at the same time your air-conditioner is operating. The dehumidifier will increase the cooling load and force the air-conditioner to work harder.

11. Seal all air-conditioner ducts and insulate ducts that run through unheated basements, crawl spaces, and attics.

12. Keep the thermostat set at 78 °F or higher if using ceiling fans. Don't air-condition unused rooms.

13. Maintain your air-conditioners properly to maximize efficiency.

Additional tips from the *Real Goods Solar Living Sourcebook*, edited by Doug Pratt and the Real Goods staff.

Warm-Weather Window Solutions

14. Install white window shades or mini-blinds. Miniblinds can reduce solar heat gain by 40 to 50 percent.

15. Close south- and west-facing curtains during the day for any window that gets direct sunlight. Keep these windows closed, too.

16. Install awnings on south-facing windows where there's insufficient roof overhang to provide shade.

17. Hang tightly woven screens or bamboo shades outside the window during the summer to stop 60 to 80 percent of the Sun's heat from getting to the windows.

18. Apply low-emissivity (low-e) films to windows.

19. Consider exotic infills in your windows, a new technology that fills the space between panes with krypton or argon, gases that have lower conductivity than air and that boost R-values (resistance to heat flow).

Tips for Your Air-Conditioner

20. If at all possible, provide shade for your room air-conditioner or the outside half of your central air-conditioner. This will increase the unit's efficiency by 5 to 10 percent.

21. Clean your air-conditioner's air filter every month during cooling season. Normal dust buildup can reduce airflow by 1 percent per week.

22. Turn off your air-conditioner when you leave for more than an hour.

23. Several studies have found that most central air-conditioning systems are oversized by 50 percent or more.

(Source: Adapted from *Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings*, by Alex Wilson, Jennifer Thorne, and John Morrill, © 2000 by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. Reprinted with the permission of Chelsea Green Publishing Company, <http://www.care2.com>)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

True Joy of Life

This is the true joy of life.
The being used for a purpose
Recognized by yourself as a mighty one.
The being a force of nature
Instead of a feverish, selfish
Little clod of ailments and grievances
Complaining that the world will not
Devote itself to making you happy.
I am of the opinion that my life
Belongs to the whole community
And as long as I live,
It is my privilege to do for it
Whatever I can.
I want to be thoroughly
Used up when I die,
For the harder I work the more I live.
I rejoice in life for its own sake.
Life is no brief candle to me.
It is a sort of splendid torch
Which I've got hold of
For the moment
And I want to make it burn
As brightly as possible before
Handing it on to future generations

—George Bernard Shaw

FINANCES

How To Most Effectively Prevent Purse Snatching, Pocket Picking, and Other Personal Thefts

In 2003, there were over 182,000 completed or attempted incidents of purse



snatching or pocket picking in the United States, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. And while it's true that senior citizens are often easy targets, they are—by far—not the only victims.

"A good pickpocket from a distance can tell who has money," says pickpocket expert Bob Arno.

And money is usually what these petty thieves are after. Contrary to popular belief, your purse or wallet is most likely to be stolen in a crowded spot, not while you are walking or shopping alone.

"If you are out there as a single person walking around, you are not going to become a target. That's very unlikely—unless the thief is targeting you," Arno says.

How NOT To Appeal to a Pickpocket or Purse Snatcher

Pickpockets choose their targets carefully. They avoid people who look confident and aware of their surroundings, and home in on those who seem more oblivious, lost, or distracted in some way.

As Arno said, "They [pickpockets] have no respect, because they feel they recognize you before you recognize them."

To reduce the odds that a pickpocket or purse snatcher will target you, the first and most important rule is to be aware of your surroundings. Then:

- Watch out for potential "set-ups," such as someone bumping into you or asking a question as a distraction while someone else steals your wallet.
- Appear confident and look like you know where you're going. Says security expert Bruce Schneier, "People who are targeted for street crimes look like victims."
- Dress down. Don't flaunt jewelry or designer labels that let a pickpocket know you're likely to have money or valuables close at hand.
- Listen to your instincts. If something feels strange, go inside a store, cross the street, or seek help.

Carrying Your Valuables Safely

Aside from how you look and act, the way you hold your purse or wallet can also be a deciding factor on whether or not you're preyed upon. Most thieves will go for the easiest target, which means that if your purse is left unattended in a shopping cart or your wallet is sticking out of your pocket, you're more at risk.

"Bad guys are looking for easy options. The idea is to make it difficult for them," says security consultant Nick Cameron, former member of SAS, Britain's elite special forces. To make your purse and wallet less tempting (and more difficult to snatch):

- Keep your purse in sight at all times. Do not hang it on the back of a chair or on the hook on a public washroom door; do not leave it unattended while shopping or trying on shoes.
- Use a wallet that can attach to your belt (also known as a money belt) and keep it out of sight.
- Always keep purses closed and carry them close to the front of your body, or held tightly under your arm.
- If your purse is slung over your head, consider wearing it under your coat (this makes it harder for a thief to yank on the strap).

You can also protect yourself in advance. In the event your purse or wallet is stolen, the impact will be less severe if you:

- Don't carry all your cash in one place.
- Carry only a small amount of cash.
- Don't keep your Social Security number in your wallet—it puts you at risk of identity theft.
- Carry only what's necessary, nothing more.
- Keep house keys in your pocket rather than your purse. If a thief steals your purse and house keys, he or she has your address and access to your home.
- Leave irreplaceable items (photos, important papers, sentimental trinkets) at home.

What To Do if Your Purse or Wallet Is Stolen

Sometimes, no matter how careful you are, you can't stop a pickpocket. The first thing to remember is that your purse or wallet is not worth getting hurt over. If someone tries to take your belongings, resist the urge to fight back. While some thieves will back down in the face of confrontation, others are willing to fight and may be carrying a weapon.

Your safety is what's most important, and while your purse/wallet can be replaced, your life cannot. Here's what to do immediately after your purse or wallet is stolen:

- Don't panic—try to think clearly.
- Call the local police department right away.
- Make a list of everything in your purse or wallet, including credit cards, checks, ID cards, cash, and other items.
- Call your credit card companies and report your cards as stolen.
- Call your bank and tell them your bank cards/checks have been stolen.
- If your driver's license was stolen, contact your local department of motor vehicles to get a new one.
- If your Social Security card was stolen, contact your local Social Security office to get a new one (the number won't be changed unless fraudulent activity is found).
- Monitor your bills for unusual activity, and report anything strange to the police.

Keep in mind, too, that purses and wallets are not the only things that get stolen. With all of the new high-tech gadgets out there, thieves have a whole new world of possibilities. In fact, iPods and cell phones have been linked to an increase in subway and bus-stop crimes in New York City.

One police source said that "iPods have made bus stops a choice location for purse snatching." Luggage, leather jackets, gold chains, and expensive sneakers are also tempting to thieves.

You don't need to walk around in fear, though. Just pay attention to what's going on around you and use common sense about displaying valuable items, and pickpockets are likely to stay away.

(Source: <http://www.sixwise.com>)

Questions/comments to:

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An online version of this newsletter may be found at http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/codecc/Pages/navig_06_06.pdf.
