

# **7 Mistakes That Lead to Too Much Stress**

## **Table of Contents**

- **Mistake #1: Working As If You Are Unbreakable**
- 
- **Mistake #2: Thinking Yourself To Death**
- 
- **Mistake #3: Setting Unrealistic Time Frames**
- 
- **Mistake #4: Suppressing Your Feelings**
- 
- **Mistake #5: Having No Sense Of Purpose Beyond Work**
- 
- **Mistake #6: Missing The Lesson**
- 
- **Mistake #7: Being Too Self Focused**
- 
- **Conclusion**
- **Final Thoughts**

## **Mistake #1: Working As If You Are Unbreakable**

Being motivated and passionate about achieving goals in your work and life is an important quality to help you get to where you want to go.

When you can focus and push yourself past your comfort zone you will achieve targets that you may have otherwise not attempted.

The danger, however, lies in not knowing when to STOP pushing yourself and literally working yourself to death!

A few years ago I became passionate about building a new business. I put all my energy into developing the ideas and getting the project off the ground. The problem was that I was also working six days a week running my own Health Care practice.

To get the business off the ground I decided to get up at 4.00a.m. and work until 6.00a.m., then go to work, come home and work again until 10.00p.m.

All I did was work. I stopped eating well, cut down my exercise and my dreams were even filled with work. I was motivated, enthusiastic and passionate and, because I was young and fairly strong, my body would handle the long hours and hard work.

I thought I was unbreakable.

However, in July 2000 my body crashed. I burnt myself out and had to take 3 weeks off work because I developed bronchitis. Yes – the health care practitioner got sick - how ironic! (They say the things you teach are the very things you have to learn in life).

Just like me, you are also breakable. Your body also has a limit to how hard you can push it.

Your body will warn you that you are getting tired with a whisper - perhaps with a mild headache, aching shoulders or feeling less patient with people.

If you ignore the whispers, the message will turn into a shout, which may result in injury, illness or a breakdown. Learn to listen to your body's whispers before they turn into shouts and stop you in your tracks.

Make a list of your body's tired signs and learn to respond to them when they occur.

Your body WILL force you to stop if you don't do it of your own free will!

To become resilient to pressure, follow the three 'R's':

### **1. REST**

If you are stealing sleep to work late then realize that your body is not regenerating and that will mean that you will simply be unable to function at your best. Rest ensures that your mind can think clearly, your body has a good source of energy, and your emotions are in control.

## **2. RELEASE**

When you are under pressure, your body is also gathering physical tension. If you are not regularly releasing the tension in your neck, shoulders, back, stomach and even your calves, then you may find that you are becoming tired faster, more irritable and have frequent aches and pains.

## **3. REPLACE**

Whatever energy you spend you need to replace. Unlike a bank, you cannot get an energy overdraft! Without replacing your energy through good nutrition and exercise, you will find that being under pressure will make you feel stressed and less focused.

## **Mistake #2: Thinking Yourself To Death**

After years of running a Health-Care practice, and working one-to-one with thousands of people, I found that what became true in a person's mind was reflected in their body.

I noticed that people who would continually worry and stress about their problems tended to develop tense muscles, become easily tired or experience headaches. When their mind was stressed, their body became stressed too.

Chewing over your mistakes and over analysing what could go wrong, or what you could have done differently, only drains your energy and distracts you from focusing on what you have to do.

Worrying is about as useful as air conditioning on a motorbike - it only uses up energy and doesn't really help your situation.

Like acid, worry will just eat you away if you let it into your life each day. There are endless things you can worry about - work, kids, money, the weather, your safety, health.....but let's face it:

- Worry doesn't change the situation
- Worry won't help time move any quicker
- Worry doesn't get you through the traffic faster
- Worry won't get you through your workload

...worry just doesn't help! So don't do it.

Instead...

Exchange worry for action

There are no scientific formulae, no esoteric mantras, and no affirmations to stop worrying...

...either do something about it or let it go.

Worry, like a hot stove, only hurts you if you touch it.

Instead of worrying about your business, finances, relationship, health, or world issues, do something about it.

Think Globally - Act Locally

Instead of worrying, look globally at the big picture and think of what outcome you would like to achieve or change.

For example, in your business you may look at the big picture and want to improve your turnover.

So instead of worrying about what might happen if your turnover drops, act locally by doing something each day that will contribute to your global objective.

Take local action every day, even if it is just to make a small improvement.

Worry is a waste of energy.

Instead take action.

From action comes results!

### **Mistake #3: Setting Unrealistic Time Frames**

We all have deadlines to meet of one type or another. Setting tight time frames can motivate you to really push yourself to bring out your best.

On the other hand, working to tight time frames can be anxiety producing and draining to the point of making you feel unwell. Take this one lady, for example, whom I worked with in my Health-Care practice...

At the time she was about 28 years old and was responsible for the safety and wellbeing of several hundred truck drivers - their rest times, their truck loads, their capacity to be safe drivers etc. She had to manage their shifts, pick-up & delivery times, rest points, as well as trouble shoot if anything went wrong.

For one person, she had a virtually impossible workload and a huge responsibility.

She loved being under pressure because she enjoyed that feeling of adrenaline and being busy which helped her think faster and get more done.

However, she got to the stage where she wasn't getting restful sleep, she would wake in the middle of the night and be throwing up because of the stress. She was experiencing headaches daily and felt tired and irritable all the time.

After a year of enduring this, she came to see me for some help. I remember that her body was so tense that she couldn't bear to have her shoulders touched. She had buried so much tension into her system that it was now breaking down and she was on the verge of falling apart.

There was no bug or virus that had caused all these problems in her - it was an accumulation of many months of ongoing built-up stress and tension. My task was to help restore some balance to her life.

So, instead of focusing solely on repairing her body's health, we discussed her lifestyle and work-style and started to make some changes.

Amongst the coping strategies that we talked about, which included; ways she could unwind at night, getting better food to eat, breathing techniques, etc. we also looked at how she could stop living her life as if she was always in a rush by changing her work projects so they were manageable.

Within 3 weeks of working together, her headaches subsided and, although she was still under stress and pressure, she wasn't waking in the night, she was keeping her dinner in her stomach, and she became a much more pleasant person.

The key to her success was to stop putting herself under unrealistic pressure to perform. Instead she set targets and time frames that were realistic without working 16 hours a day.

Stop and look at the stress in your own life that relates to being late, getting work finished, getting all the tasks done by the end of your day. Are you setting unrealistic expectations and deadlines that put you 'on-the-go' all day everyday? If so, then realise that at that consistent pace, your body will eventually break down.

Take action while you still have the choice - reduce the amount of deadlines you live under or extend them to be more realistic.

Try these 4 steps:

- a. Look at what you have to do in your day and write down the key goals - make sure you include the deadline for each – but make it a realistic deadline.
- b. For each goal, write down the list of actions you need in order to reach it. Also, allocate the right time frame that each action will take to complete.
- c. Put together a master plan that schedules all the tasks of all the goals.
  - I. Make a global plan: From start to finish of each goal, schedule into your diary when each step needs to be completed.
  - II. Make a local plan: A weekly, and daily, plan of what tasks need to be completed.
- d. Identify if your goals/targets are, in fact, achievable given the time you have available. If they aren't, then you are setting yourself up for stress and tension, so you will need to either adjust your time frames or reduce your workload to ensure that you are not working yourself too hard to try and accomplish something that is unreachable.

## **Mistake #4: Suppressing Your Feelings**

In November of 2000, a man came to see me in my Health-Care practice who said his neck and back were giving him some trouble. He told me that he had gone through some recent stress, but didn't reveal any more detail than that.

After doing a physical and energetic assessment, I decided I needed to release the tension in the muscles on either side of his spine.

When I got to his middle back, there was a section that felt very tense - as if his muscles were in a spasm - so I worked fairly firmly to release it.

In the philosophy of some natural therapies, such as Shiatsu, if a person has been keeping their feelings or stresses bottled up inside, their body may become tense on part of their middle or upper back. (It is interesting how your body can reflect a picture of your emotions.)

At the end of the session, when I asked him how he was feeling, he told me that as I was working on that middle section on his back, he suddenly felt this strong feeling of frustration and anger come up out of nowhere. It was as if all that emotional tension that he had kept to himself was coming to the surface. A few minutes later those feelings just disappeared completely and he felt very calm and peaceful.

He then went on to tell me that he had recently been through a difficult relationship break-up and that he kept a lot of his frustration bottled up because he found it difficult to talk about his feelings.

Realize that your body is a walking diary of your life's events. Your body holds all your tensions and feelings that aren't expressed or released.

Keeping your feelings locked up inside is like putting more and more air into a balloon - eventually the pressure of the air will somehow have to force its way out.

Whether it be in your business or personal life - how you deal with your emotions will affect your behaviour, your mood and how patiently you interact with your customers, clients, colleagues, and friends.

Everything in life needs space to let go so that they can grow.

Practice expressing your feelings each day in one of three ways:

1. Talk to people about your feelings. Find someone who can listen without trying to tell you what to do.
2. Talk to yourself. No, it doesn't mean that you are crazy – but sometimes just talking out loud in front of a mirror can help to clarify, and express, how you feel and can clear your head.
3. Write it down in a letter. Not on the computer - but a hand written letter. Writing it out can be a powerful way of releasing emotions by expressing your feelings without worrying about saying the wrong thing to someone. At the end of your letter, re-read it and then tear it up. This is not a diary to be kept - it is only a way to get your feelings out.



Getting your feelings out by talking, writing or other means, can help clarify what your thoughts and bring your challenges into perspective. Withheld emotions tend make problems feel a lot big than they may actually be.

## **Mistake #5: Having No Sense Of Purpose Beyond Work**

In the 1940's, Victor Frankl, a trained psychiatrist, was one of the many prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps of World War II. Like the millions of other prisoners, he was forced to endure heavy physical labour, exhaustion, starvation, beatings and the strategic stripping of his human dignity.

Following his release in 1945, he compiled a book called *Man's search for Meaning*. Apart from a recollection of the atrocities he had endured, this book is an insight as to how he was able to cope and stay alive under such horrendous living conditions and what the human spirit requires in order to survive. In his book he writes,

*"He who has a WHY can bear almost any HOW. To survive anything requires a sense of meaning. If we can identify what brings us meaning then we can identify a motivation that can lead or take us through anything."*

Have you ever found yourself giving up hope or feeling stuck in a rut? Do you ever feel that your life is just about getting up - going to work - coming home - watching television - going to bed?

This is NOT what life should be all about! Don't lose sight of your dreams by falling into the pattern of monotony. Get clear on your dreams - your reasons 'WHY' you are living - so that you are not just existing through each day, but really living. But how?

Try this...

You need to acknowledge your personal needs and make sure that you do things that you enjoy doing.

You need to acknowledge your relationship needs and regularly connect with people.

You need to acknowledge your spiritual needs and learn more about who you are and what you want from life.

You need to keep setting goals, having aspirations and dreaming dreams that give your life meaning.

Highlight the reasons 'why' you are living. Make every day filled with excitement and desire so that you are propelled into your day, instead of going through it dragging your feet.

As a priority step before you go to bed this evening, spend at least 20 minutes writing down how you would like your life to turn out.

Include:

- What legacy do you want to leave when you eventually die?
- How would you like people to remember you?
- What difference do you want to make to yourself? Your family? Friends? Society?

- What would you need to experience, achieve or own to be able to say 'I lived without regrets?'

Create a sense of meaning in your life beyond 'going to work and paying the bills'.

Before you get out of bed tomorrow (and each day for that matter), reaffirm what you want to achieve in the day and in your life.

Keep your dreams and desires alive by regularly engaging in activities, conversations and literature that inspires you and makes life interesting.

## **Mistake #6: Missing The Lesson**

If you find yourself experiencing the same repeated stresses and problems over and over in your life then maybe you are missing the lesson behind them.

With every challenge we face, every crisis we deal with, and every tragedy we endure is a life lesson waiting for us to learn.

Our lessons are like gifts of learning that are wrapped in boxes called 'problems'...and sometimes it has several layers of wrapping.

When I had the difficult task of packing up my sister's flat after she passed away, I discovered a poem she had written amongst some notes. It epitomized how life presents us with stresses and problems so we can grow in strength, wisdom and character.

The Poem

*I asked for strength - and God gave me difficulties to make me strong*

*I asked for wisdom - and God gave me problems to solve*

*I asked for prosperity - and God gave me a brain and brawn to work*

*I asked for courage - and God gave me dangers to overcome*

*I asked for love - and God gave me troubled people to help*

*I asked for favours - and God gave me opportunities*

*I received nothing I wanted*

*I received everything I needed*

*My prayer has been answered*

Don't make the mistake of missing the lesson that life is trying to teach you. Realize that every challenge presents you with an opportunity to grow and stretch beyond your comfort zone.

Becoming resilient to pressure is not solely about being able to endure hardship longer than anyone else. Developing resilience is also how quickly and eloquently you can 'bounce back' from pressures that may stop others in their tracks.

By using your setbacks and obstacles as opportunities to learn something about yourself, instead of an endurance test, you gain the insight necessary to bounce back and keep working towards your goals and ambitions.

You may find yourself working with people who you don't like perhaps so that you can learn about patience, assertiveness or acceptance. Look beyond the people and situations that make you feel

stressed and see what life is trying to teach you.

In every challenging or stressful situation lies a pearl of wisdom waiting to be discovered.

You may not be able to see the learning when you are right in the middle of the crises or setback - but it's there. It may only become evident to you days or weeks after the event.

Today, get a blank notebook and write 'Life's Lessons' on the front.

Write down each lesson your have learnt from your setbacks and obstacles. You'll understand why in 12 months time when you re- read your notes and see how much you have learnt about yourself.

Understand that your mistakes are really just stepping stones helping you find where the right step is by eliminating the wrong steps.

Understand that criticism is a gift that helps you improve and become stronger in areas of your work and life where you may not have known about or have been willing to look at. Rather than getting upset or worked up at situations that don't go your way, focus on what could be learnt, instead of on what was lost.

In every challenging situation, ask yourself:

- a. What is this situation helping me to learn about myself?
- b. What positive lesson can I get from all of this?
- c. How will this situation help to make me stronger?

## **Mistake #7: Being Too Self Focused**

When I was developing my business and working hard to reach my goals, I put all my focus on reaching my targets. It was like I could only talk about my business, and that achieving my goals became the most important thing in my life.

As a result I neglected my wife's and children's needs and, hence, began losing the connection I had with them. I stopped asking my wife how her day was, what she did or how she was feeling. I only focused on myself. I became less interested in my kids development and put videos on for them to watch so I could do a bit more work. I became the centre of my universe.

Sure, I was achieving my goals - but at a cost!

One day my wife sat me down to have one of those 'talks'. She said 'Michael, I'm not feeling 'wooded' or 'special' anymore - I feel like I just fit into your life and that you are taking me, and the kids, for granted'.

Let me tell you, my wife has a way of putting things that make you sit up and listen. I was lucky that she pointed out that I was getting too wrapped up in my own needs and neglected my family before we drifted any further. She has helped me stay on track by reminding me that other people need my attention too.

Don't wait for a wake-up call before you realize the importance of making time to connect with your family and friends.

No matter how busy life gets, how important you think work is, or how urgently work has to get done, unless you are connecting with the people who are special in your life then you will be missing the very things you are working so hard to have in your life.

It has been said that we should work to live - not live to work. I know that you don't always have the luxury of switching off at night and leaving work at work. You may have to work harder and longer to ensure that all the deadlines are met. There is a lot of pride in doing a good job.

However, if that is taking your all your focus and time away from your family and friends, then you have to question - what's it all for? Is it really worth it?

Each night, spend time connecting with your family and friends.

As important as work is, it won't always be there for you - but your family probably will, so make sure you put them as high on your priority 'to do' list as your work commitments.

## Conclusion

You can get insurance to protect your car, house and boat.

You can get insurance to protect your health and income.

You can even get insurance in case of death, disability and trauma.

Yet, how do you insure your ability to work and/or drive your business?

How do you protect yourself from burnout?

Your capacity to work and perform is what keeps you employed or in business. If your performance is compromised, so is your working capacity, stamina and quality...not to mention your wellbeing and quality of life.

You are not a machine. Your body will break down and you will experience stress if you consistently push yourself beyond your working capacity.

There are lots of pressures that people in business face each day: long hours, pressing deadlines, too many days on the road, difficult or demanding clients, family issues...and I could keep going on and on.

So, how can you become resilient to these pressures? Do you learn stress management?

NO! Stress Management doesn't work!

I should know. After working with over 4000 people in my health care practice I can tell you that trying to reduce stress is doomed for failure.

Why?

Because stress is just a 'symptom' of a person who is not resilient.

There's no point fixing a symptom if you don't deal with the cause.

That's like taking a painkiller for a headache without addressing the possible causes like neck tension, dehydration, hormone imbalance, tiredness or spinal misalignment (subluxation). The headache is bound to return because the cause hasn't been dealt with.

Instead of trying to reduce stress, learn how to become resilient to pressure so you can quickly bounce back from the setbacks, obstacles or challenges in business, work and life. This way, regardless of what is thrown your way, you are able to sustain, and even expand, your personal capacity and productivity when working under pressure.

The bottom line is you need to take responsibility for your 'bounce back' and resilience to pressure, and not rely on the company, other people, or a system to 'fix' your problems.

You need to know how to...

- Work at your best without burning yourself out.
- Prevent clients or customers from draining you.
- Spring back from setbacks, obstacles and problems.
- Focus for hours at a time without getting neck, back or eyestrain.
- Handle negative feedback without getting upset.

Learning how to become resilient to pressure is the closest thing there is to having 'performance insurance'.



## **Final Thoughts**

Please, don't just read this e-book – take some action! Information without action is useless!

Don't wait for the warning signs, the burnout, the overload, or tension before being proactive.

Over the next 24 hours, act on just one idea in this e-book, then repeat the process for another idea over the following 24 hours.

Here are only seven of the mistakes that people make which create stress in their lives. However, if you take action on just one idea each day, I know that you will become more resilient to the pressures and challenges that life throws at you.

I wish you every success in your life.

Michael Licenblat B.Sc.(Psych), Dip.(Shiatsu)