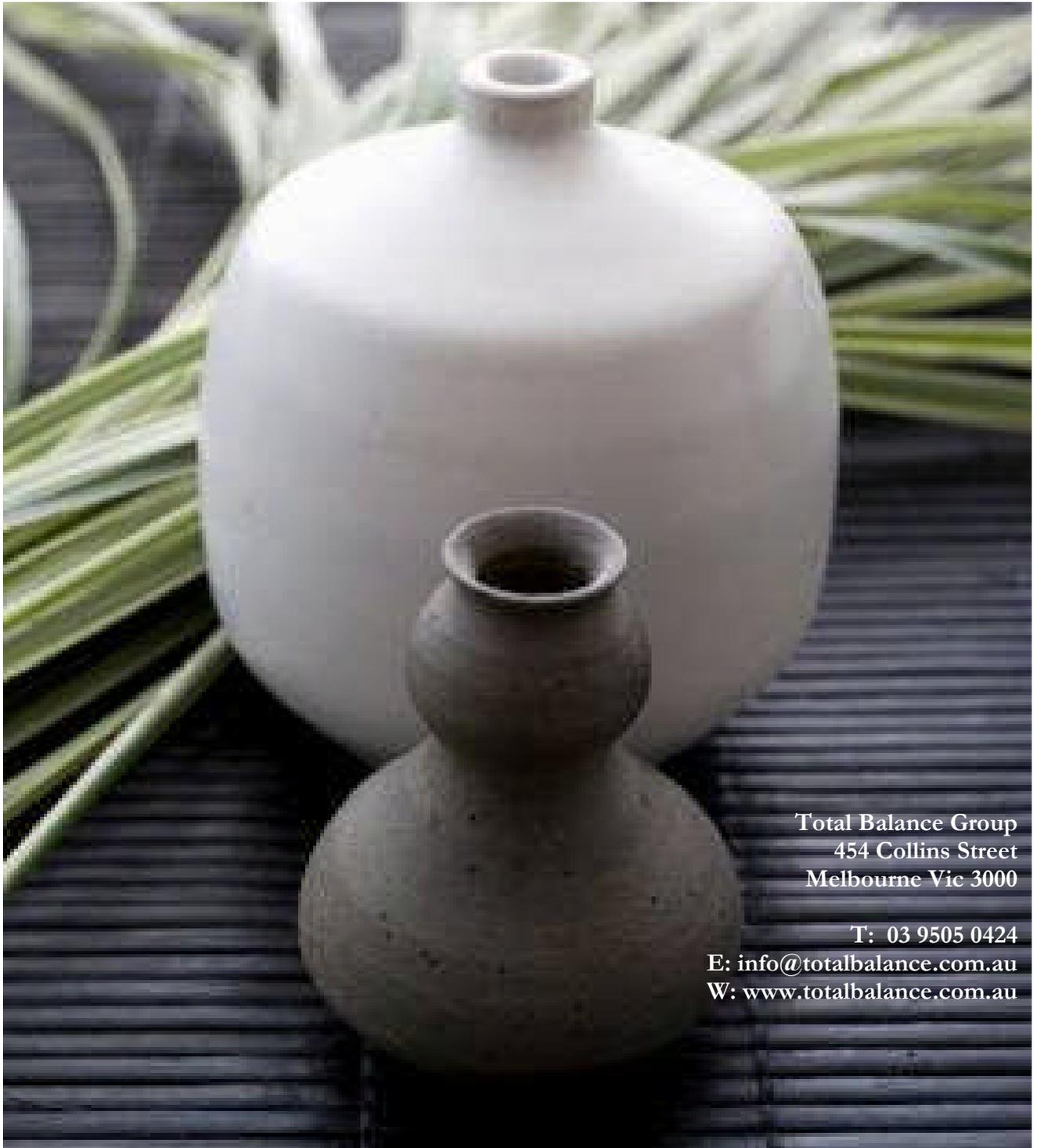


# creating better balance



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## What is work life balance?

*'Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.'* Mark Twain

We believe that balance is something you need to define for yourself. It's important to find a life path that is right for you. From our experience that's different for everyone.

We think balance is about your state of mind as much as anything else. It isn't necessarily about having equal amounts of time or energy for work and for all of the other things you'd like to include in your life. You don't need to be perfect to feel a sense of balance.

We believe balance is about the sense of inner harmony you feel when you're on the right track and when you can honestly say you're enjoying the journey.

To feel that sense of harmony, you need to begin by feeling comfortable to be yourself. To know and understand your personal strengths, values and beliefs and to be confident to pursue the choices that are right for you.

Living in balance means living authentically. It means making time for the things that matter and being honest and open in your relationships.

For many people, balance means loving your work. Knowing that when you go to work, you're doing something that is genuinely fulfilling for you.

Living life in a balanced way is taking care of your health – both physically and emotionally.

And it means living creatively. Even if you don't feel naturally creative - we're creative beings, so it's worth taking the time to find out what this might mean for you.

A balanced state of mind is about accepting life's challenges as well as life's joys. It means giving up judgement of yourself and others. It can be about embracing change, learning from failure, knowing that you can grow and being willing to strive for something better. As well as learning to accept the way things are, it's also making time for purposeful planning.

Once you achieve a state of relative balance, we can pretty much guarantee you, it won't be permanent. Life is constantly changing and the scales are easily tipped in one direction or another.

The important thing to aim for is the sense that you're moving towards balance, not away from it.

# Your current balance

Score 1 for each YES, 0 for each NO and half a point for 'somewhere in between'.

| QUESTION  | YES | NO |
|---|-----|----|
| I know my natural strengths and talents and how I can use them.   |     |    |
| I have a 'bigger picture' purpose in life and know how I will achieve this.   |     |    |
| I am living a life I'm proud of and I have something to look forward to every day.  |     |    |
| I have a clear picture of three important things I would like to achieve in the next twelve months and I know how I will reach these goals. |     |    |
| I know how to keep myself motivated with regard to achieving my goals.  |     |    |
| I understand what success means to me.  |     |    |
| I feel a sense of control with regard to my finances and financial plans.   |     |    |
| I love my work and feel that what I do is aligned with my values.   |     |    |
| I feel free to communicate clearly in all of my relationships and know I will be heard and understood.                                      |     |    |
| Others find me inspirational and positive because of the way I live my life.  |     |    |
| I know how to say no.   |     |    |
| I have great relationships with the people I work with.   |     |    |
| I have a supportive network of friends who encourage me to live my ideal life.  |     |    |
| I am happy with my relationships with my parents and siblings.  |     |    |
| I have a life partner who delights me and our relationship gets better every year.  |     |    |
| I am happy with my physical appearance.   |     |    |
| I eat a healthy diet, manage alcohol and coffee intake and exercise at least three times per week.  |     |    |
| I make time to do something indulgent or relaxing for myself every week.  |     |    |
| I take annual holidays and really unwind.   |     |    |
| I feel calm and in control most of the time.  |     |    |
| <b>Your score out of 20:</b>  |     |    |



## **Moving beyond the barriers to balance**

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- 1. Managing time**
- 2. Developing resilience**
- 3. Overcoming self sabotage**
- 4. Managing stress**

## Managing time

### HAVE A 'BIG PICTURE' VIEW

If you know what you're working towards in five years' time (or even by the end of the week), it's easier to prioritise your short-term objectives. A clear vision for the future also helps you to set meaningful goals and feel a sense of purpose in your personal and professional life.

According to a Harvard Business School Study, 83% of the population do not have clearly defined goals, 14% have goals but they are not written down and only 3% actually write their goals down. The 3% who have written goals reported much better health and greater satisfaction with their relationships than those without goals and their earnings were on average 10 times higher.

**Personal:** Are you clear about what you want in your life? For example, do you know where you want to live, the lifestyle you'd like, the relationships that are most important, countries you would like to travel to, roles you want to fulfil, things you'd like to learn about?

**Professional:** Clarify your business and career goals. Very few people have a clear understanding of how these goals relate to their day-to-day work and how they should organise their time so that the most important goals are given top priority. If you do not have this clarity, rather than working efficiently, you may end up spending too much quality time on lower priority activities.

# Managing time (continued...)

## WRITE DOWN CLEAR GOALS & ACTION STEPS

Write down your long and short-term goals including all of the elements that you would like to include in your ideal life. It's often easier to begin with the longer-term goals then to break these down into smaller parts. e.g. A financial goal might be 'to be generating passive income of \$20,000 per annum from my investments by the time I'm 65' (long term goal) breaks down into short term goal of 'to save \$1,000 a month into high interest account commencing July 2011'. Where possible, try to make your goals SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time framed). This won't be possible for every goal but it's useful to include measurability where you can e.g. 'to have one-on-one time with my partner at least two nights each week' or 'to go to the gym for thirty minutes three times each week'.

Internal goals are often less measurable. If you're someone who likes to feel a sense of achievement, create measurement where you can. An example of an internal goal that is measurable might be 'to keep my stress levels under 6/10 at all times'. Try to write your goals in a positive way where possible.

### Goal #1

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### Goal #2

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### Goal #3

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## Managing time (continued...)

### PRIORITISE YOUR TASKS

Once you have completed your goals list, review your goals and choose those that are your most important priorities for now.

Identify actions steps that are applicable to these goals and add these to your task list. Once you have listed all of your tasks, prioritise your list from 1 to 3 (with 1 tasks being the most important and 3 being the least). The easiest way to do this is in Excel, entering your tasks in column B and entering your priority score in column A next to each of the tasks on your list.

| PRIORITY | TASK - PROFESSIONAL        |
|----------|----------------------------|
| 1        | Write newsletter           |
| 1        | Submit expenses            |
| 1        | Update timetable           |
|          |                            |
| 2        | Finalise financial reports |
| 3        | Revise price lists         |
| PRIORITY | TASK - PERSONAL            |
| 1        | Book holiday to Thailand   |
|          |                            |
| 2        | Clean out wardrobe         |
| 3        | Submit tax return          |

Sort your list so that all of your number 1 tasks appear at the top of the list. Enter a blank line beneath your number 1 priority tasks – for this week, you will only focus on the number 1 priorities.

You may find it easier to split your professional and personal tasks into two sections on the page.

## Managing time (continued...)

### SCHEDULE ACTIVITIES INTO YOUR DIARY

Once you know which activities you'd like to incorporate in your week, schedule the time for each of these into your diary. Don't neglect the things that may get left until last such as exercise; seeing your children before they go to bed or making time for your partner.



TIP: Contact us for a copy of our 'Ideal Week' template so that you can draft your own.

### EACH MORNING, CREATE A REALISTIC DAILY LIST AND STICK TO IT

At the start of each day select a number of priority 1 tasks that you think you can realistically complete that day and write these up on a Post-It note to keep on your desk.

Make a commitment to work on the first task on your list until you can either complete this task or you have gone as far as you can go (or until you are interrupted by something or someone that genuinely takes higher priority than this task). Do whatever you can to avoid interruptions and schedule a short break every 20 minutes to keep your concentration fresh.

# Managing time (continued...)

## UNDERSTAND WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Understand the difference between 'Urgent' and 'Important' activities. Steven Covey's book 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' uses a simple matrix for time management. Covey's focus is less on activities and time and more on preserving and enhancing relationships and on accomplishing results. Covey breaks tasks into four categories. Generally speaking, urgent activities are someone else's priority while important activities, are your priority. His recommendation is that we stay out of quadrants III and IV and minimise the time we spend in quadrant I by focusing more on the activities in quadrant II.

|               |              | URGENT  | NOT URGENT   |
|---------------|--------------|---|--|
| IMPORTANT     | QUADRANT I   | <p><i>Activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crises</li> <li>Pressing problems</li> <li>Deadline-driven projects</li> </ul> <p><i>(leads to stress, burn out)</i></p>   | <p><i>Activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevention</li> <li>Relationship building</li> <li>Recognising new opportunities</li> <li>Planning, recreation</li> </ul> <p><i>(creates balance, discipline, perspective)</i></p>        |
|               | QUADRANT III | <p><i>Activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interruptions, some calls</li> <li>Some mail, some reports</li> <li>Some meetings</li> <li>Pressing matters</li> <li>Popular activities</li> </ul> <p><i>(short term focus, crisis management, feels out of control)</i></p> | <p><i>Activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trivia</li> <li>Some mail</li> <li>Some calls</li> <li>Time wasters</li> <li>Pleasant activities</li> </ul> <p><i>(viewed as irresponsible, not dependable, can lead to job loss)</i></p> |
| NOT IMPORTANT |              |   |  |



TIP: Read Steven Covey's 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'

## Managing time (continued...)

### TIPS ON HOW TO MAXIMISE YOUR EFFICIENCY

When you're not in 'time out' mode, be willing to set boundaries with either in-person or telephone interruptions. If a phone call has achieved its main purpose, know how to wrap it up. If a colleague drops in on a regular basis, practise a few phrases that will let them know you're happy to catch up, but you have an important deadline to meet. Minimise telephone tag by leaving messages that clarify when you'll be available to talk. Let people know if you're generally in your office at a certain time of day and that this is a good time to catch you. Where possible, 'batch' tasks - i.e. return all of your calls during one part of the day; do your written work at another time etc. Take note of which times in your day feel like the natural times to complete certain tasks.

### **Most people find that email controls a huge amount of time.**

- If it takes more than two emails to resolve an issue, pick up the phone rather than keeping the email conversation going.
- Don't be available on email all day. Let people know that they should call you for any urgent enquiries. Set aside half an hour at the beginning, middle and at the end of each day to deal with all email correspondence.
- Keep your email replies brief and don't cc anyone who doesn't need to be copied in. Where possible, bullet point important items and avoid capital letters, bolding, underlining and exclamation marks. Keep your emails professional at all times - remember, it's in writing.
- Turn off all email reminders including alarms and previews and where possible, close down your email program for chunks of time during the day.
- Never respond to an email in the heat of the moment. If you're angry or upset, hold off before responding. Remember, there's no tone in email so it's easy to be misinterpreted.
- Take a minute to review emails before sending. Because so many email replies are rushed, errors are common. Don't lower your professional standards by not attending to spelling and punctuation errors.
- Review the documents you use on a regular basis and create templates to save time.

## Developing Resilience. Resilient people:

**Are flexible and learn from experience.** Resilient people know that life is always changing. They rapidly assimilate to new or unexpected experiences and enjoy being challenged.

**Adapt quickly.** They know how to adapt to suit a range of environments and situations. Resilient people are comfortable with contradictory personality qualities. They can be both strong and gentle, sensitive and tough, logical and intuitive, calm and emotional, serious and playful, and so forth.

**Have solid self-esteem and self-confidence.** Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself. It determines how much you learn after something goes wrong. It allows you to receive praise and compliments. Self-confidence is your reputation with yourself. It allows you to take risks without waiting for approval or reassurance from others.

**Have good friendships and loving relationships.** Research shows that people who work in challenging roles are more stress resistant and are less likely to get sick when they have a loving family and good friendships. Talking with friends and family diminishes the impact of difficulties and increases feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.

**Express feelings honestly.** Resilient people know how to express anger, love, dislike, appreciation, grief - the entire range of human emotions honestly and openly. They can also choose to suppress their feelings when they believe it would be best to do so.

**Expect things to work out well.** Most successful people have a deep sense of optimism guided by internal values and standards.

**Read others with empathy.** They are able to see things through the perspectives of others.

**Use intuition, creative hunches.** Resilient people generally accept subliminal perception and intuition as valid, useful sources of information.

**Defend themselves well.** They avoid and block attacks and they fight back (appropriately).

**Have positive self-talk.** They have reasonable expectations of themselves and generally avoid 'beating themselves up' internally. They know how to acknowledge their own successes.

**Proactively pursue a life that they want.** Resilient people set goals and pursue them actively. When they meet with a set back, they don't see the obstacle as a permanent barrier to success. They find another way to achieve what they want.

**Know how to relax.** While hardworking and often driven, the individuals who bounce back the fastest are those who know how to unwind. They keep their stress levels within a manageable range.

**Live more in the present moment.** As well as knowing how to relax, resilient people are able to enjoy the 'here and now' rather than always worrying about the future or ruminating over the past.

**Look after their health.** They exercise regularly, get enough sleep, eat reasonably well and moderate their intake of caffeine, alcohol and other stimulants.

# Measuring your resilience

Rate yourself from 1 to 5 on the following: (1 = very little, 5 = very strong)

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | In a crisis or chaotic situation, I calm myself and focus on taking useful actions.   |
|  | I'm usually optimistic. I see difficulties as temporary and expect to overcome them.  |
|  | I can tolerate high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty about situations.   |
|  | I adapt quickly to new developments. I'm good at bouncing back from difficulties.   |
|  | I'm playful. I find the humour in rough situations, and can laugh at myself.  |
|  | I'm able to recover emotionally from losses and setbacks. I have friends I can talk with. I can express my feelings to others and ask for help. Feelings of anger and discouragement don't last long. |
|  | I feel self-confident, appreciate myself and have a healthy concept of who I am.  |
|  | I'm curious. I ask questions. I want to know how things work. I try new ways of doing things.   |
|  | I learn valuable lessons from my experiences and from the experiences of others.  |
|  | I'm good at solving problems. I can use analytical logic, be creative, or use practical common sense.   |
|  | I'm good at making things work well. I'm often asked to lead groups and projects.   |
|  | I'm very flexible. I feel comfortable with my paradoxical complexity. I'm optimistic and pessimistic, trusting and cautious, unselfish and selfish, and so forth.                                     |
|  | I'm always myself, but I've noticed that I'm different in different situations.   |
|  | I prefer to work without a written job description. I'm more effective when I'm free to do what I think is best in each situation.  |
|  | I 'read' people well and trust my intuition.  |
|  | I'm a good listener. I have good empathy skills.  |
|  | I'm non-judgmental about others and adapt to people's different personality styles.   |
|  | I'm very durable. I hold up well during tough times. I have an independent spirit underneath my cooperative way of working with others.   |
|  | I've been made stronger and better by difficult experiences.  |
|  | I've converted misfortune into good luck and found benefits in bad experiences.   |

**Scoring:**

- 80 or higher      Very resilient
- 65-80             Better than most
- 50-65             Adequate
- 40-50             You're probably struggling
- 40 or under      Get some support to develop your resilience

# Developing resilience

## DEVELOP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Having a positive outlook really makes a difference. Martin Seligman (author of 'Learned Optimism') makes the following recommendations about how to improve your optimism.

### 1. Permanence vs transient

People who give up easily believe the causes of their negative experiences are permanent. They believe that negative events will persist and will always affect their lives. People who resist helplessness believe the causes of bad events are temporary.

*Permanent (Pessimistic) / Temporary (Optimistic)*

'Diets never work.' / 'Diets don't work when you break them.'  
'You always nag.' / 'You nag when I don't clean my room.'

The optimistic style of explaining good events is the opposite of the optimistic style of explaining bad events. People who believe good events have permanent causes are more optimistic than people who believe they have temporary causes.

*Temporary (Pessimistic) / Permanent (Optimistic)*

'It's my lucky day.' / 'I'm always lucky.'  
'I try hard.' / 'I'm talented.'

Optimists explain *good and bad* events in terms of permanent causes: traits, abilities, always's.  
Pessimists explain *good and bad* events in terms of transient causes: moods, effort, sometimes's.

### 2. Pervasiveness: Specific vs. Universal

Some people can easily put their troubles neatly into a box and go about their lives even when one important aspect is suffering. Others catastrophise. When one thread of their lives comes undone, the whole fabric unravels.

People who make universal explanations for their failures give up on everything when they strike a failure in one area. People who make specific explanations may become helpless in one part of their lives yet march stalwartly on in the others.

*Universal (Pessimistic) / Specific (Optimistic)*

'All lecturers are unfair.' / 'My psychology professor is unfair.'  
'I'm unattractive.' / 'I'm unattractive to him.'

The optimistic explanatory style for good events is opposite that of bad events. The optimist believes that bad events have specific causes. The pessimist believes that bad events have universal causes and that good events are caused by specific factors.

*Specific (Pessimistic) / Universal (Optimistic)*

'I'm smart at science.' / 'I'm smart.'  
'I was charming to her.' / 'I was charming.'

## Developing resilience (continued...)

### 3. Personalisation : Internal vs. External

When bad things happen, we can blame ourselves (internalise) or we can blame other people or circumstances (externalise). People who blame themselves when they fail have low self-esteem as a consequence. They think they are worthless, talentless, and unlovable. People who blame external events do not lose self-esteem when a negative event occurs. On the whole, they like themselves better.

*Internal (low self-esteem) / External (high self-esteem)*

'I'm hopeless with money.' / 'I haven't been taught good financial management.'  
 'I'm insecure.' / 'I grew up in a family where my confidence wasn't developed.'

The optimistic style of explaining good events is the opposite of that used for bad events: It's internal rather than external. People who believe they cause good things tend to like themselves better.

*External (Pessimistic) / Internal (Optimistic)*

'A stroke of luck ...' / 'I can take advantage of luck.'  
 'My teammates' skill ...' / 'My skill ...'

Personalisation is the easiest dimension to overrate. Personalisation controls only how you feel about yourself.

Pervasiveness and Permanence - the more important dimensions - control what you do; how long you are hopeless and across how many situations.

#### **The ABCDE Method of Learned Optimism:**

A - Adversity - Define the problem.

B - Belief - Define the belief system that is interpreting that adversity.

C - Consequences - Define the consequences arising from the adversity and the (in)action.

D - Disputation - Argue the core belief and effectively dispute the belief that follow the adversity.

E - Energisation - The positive feelings that overcome the negative thoughts after the disputation step.



TIP: Read Martin Seligman's book 'Learned Optimism' for more information.

## Developing resilience (continued...)

### DEVELOP SELF-BELIEF

The brain has a strong negative bias, which means that many of the thoughts we have are self-deprecating. Self-belief is something you can learn but as with anything new, it takes some discipline.

- Listen to your self-talk. Become aware of how often your thoughts are self-critical. When you notice any negativity, stop your thoughts and think of something you've done well recently.
- Understand your unique strengths and learn about how you can use these more both at work and in your personal life.

#### My top 5 strengths are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

- Use role models to help you develop characteristics you want to enhance such as self-confidence, poise, professionalism, diplomacy or any other area that will help improve your sense of self. Observe how your role model conducts himself or herself and 'adopt' the characteristics you want to learn. You might have to 'fake it' at first but practising new behaviours will build your self-belief.
- Learn how to defend yourself well without being aggressive. See the following notes on authenticity to guide you.

## Developing resilience (continued...)

### DEVELOP AUTHENTICITY

One of the earliest things we learn is how to 'be nice' to other people. Unfortunately, sometimes this can leave us also feeling that we can't state our needs and wants truthfully. Developing authenticity can also mean 'unlearning' your inclination to always put others' needs ahead of your own.

Authentic people know who they are; they know their values and strengths and they are willing to take full responsibility for their happiness and wellbeing. Being authentic doesn't mean saying everything that's on your mind. It's about having a clear idea about the sort of relationships you are trying to create and feeling comfortable to state your preferences. When you're being authentic, you hold onto your personal power. You behave with respect and dignity and you learn to make requests about what you want, what you don't want, what you think and what you feel.

#### Principles of authenticity:

- be respectful
- be assertive, not aggressive
- authentic conversation doesn't create drama nor is it emotional
- don't play the victim or act like a martyr
- keep away from personal attacks, simply state your preferences
- there's no need to make anyone wrong nor do you need to be right

When you begin to try to express yourself authentically, you may find that your mind goes blank (like a rabbit caught in the headlights) or occasionally, you may find that you've come across as aggressive. If either of these occur, get back on track as quickly as you can. You may need to revisit a conversation and say what you were unable to say if you were stunned or you may need to apologise if you've been impolite. The key is to remain true to yourself.

## Developing resilience (continued...)

### DEVELOP FLEXIBILITY

Most people become more fixed in their ideas, more set in their ways and more stubborn about their beliefs as they get older. One of the greatest things about (most) young people is their willingness to be open to new ideas.

Check in with yourself from time to time. Are you still flexible and adaptable? Or have you become rigid and stubborn? Developing a flexible and open-minded approach to life helps you to be more resilient.

### DEVELOP LIGHTNESS

Life is going to be difficult at times. Unfortunately, there's no getting around this. The only thing we can control is how we respond.

We're not suggesting you try to get rid of difficult thoughts and feelings, nor are we suggesting that you respond to life's challenges in an unrealistic way (we'll talk more about this later) but there are times when you can use a little bit of lightness to help diffuse the seriousness of a situation.

Humour (particularly when it's not sarcastic or at the expense of someone else) can lighten a difficult situation and help you regain perspective.

# Overcome self sabotage

All of us find ways to sabotage our success – often we’re not even aware that we’re doing it. Common ways we self sabotage include procrastinating, not following through with goals, not preparing well, taking the role of the victim and lacking self belief. Do what you can to address these issues – or if you find it difficult to do this alone, seek professional help.

**How do you self sabotage?**

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**What is one thing you can do to overcome this?**

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## The choice gap

Once you have identified how you self sabotage, you need to choose behaviours that will allow you to succeed. When we continue with the excuses we've always used, we're powerless to change. And even once we decide to commit to change, often we find ourselves falling into old behaviours habitually.

The latest research tells us that for most people, creating lasting change often takes seven attempts. The key to creating new habits is to develop your self-awareness. Begin to notice your choices. Successful people are focused – everything they do leads them toward their goals.

### **Four stages of habitual behaviour:**

Unconscious incompetence

Conscious incompetence

[CHOICE GAP]

Conscious competence

Unconscious competence

### **THE CHOICE GAP - PAUSE**

Pause on the edge of a decision for just thirty seconds. Then try widening the Choice Gap each time you're faced with a similar decision. e.g. Before putting something on the credit card, ask yourself if the behaviour will support you in achieving your long term goals. If you're uncertain, walk away from the decision for twenty-four hours.

## Managing stress. How do we define stress?

There are many definitions of stress. Researchers define stress as a physical, mental, or emotional response to events that causes bodily or mental tension. Simply put, stress is any outside force or event that has an effect on our body or mind.

### TYPES OF STRESS

Depending on the stressors and the types of changes or events we are dealing with, stress can manifest itself physically, emotionally and/or mentally.

**Physical** – this occurs when the body as a whole starts to suffer as a result of a stressful situation. Symptoms can manifest in a variety of ways and vary in their seriousness.

The most common physical symptom is headaches because stress causes people to unconsciously tense their neck, forehead and shoulder muscles. However long-term stress can lead to digestive problems, insomnia, fatigue, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and even hair loss.

**Emotional** – these responses are due to stress affecting the mind and include anxiety, anger, depression, irritability, frustration, over-reaction to everyday problems, memory loss and a lack of concentration for any task.

Anxiety is normally shown as a response to loss, failure, danger or a fear of the unknown. Anger is a common response to frustration or social stress and can become a danger to other individuals if not kept in check. Depression is frequently seen as an emotional response to upsetting situations such as the death of a loved one, illness and failure.

**Psychological** – long-term stress can cause psychological problems in some individuals. Symptoms include withdrawal from society, phobias, compulsive behaviors, eating disorders and night terrors.

## Stress statistics

### **STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE IS INCREASING**

- 1 in 3 adults suffers from moderate to extreme stress. (ABS National Health Survey 2001/ Grant Thornton IBOS Survey 2004)
- This represents an increase of nearly 40% in just 4 years. (ABS National Health Survey 2001)

### **STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE COSTS MONEY**

- Stress-related workers compensation claims have increased by 400% in the last 10 years. (WorkCover SHM June 04).
- The payout costs have doubled in the last 6 years. (Vic WorkCover Hugh Keller @bdw July 04)
- The total cost of Australian workplace stress, is now estimated to be \$1.2 billion pa. (ACTU Bill Mansfield May 2000)

### **STRESS NOT ONLY COSTS IN TERMS OF COMPENSATION CLAIMS, BUT ALSO IN LOST PRODUCTIVITY**

- Work-related stress accounts for the longest stretches of absenteeism. (National Health and Safety Commission, Better Health Channel Vic Gov July 04)

### **THE STRESS PROBLEM IS EVEN BIGGER THAN THESE FIGURES SHOW**

- GPs report that less than half of the work-related symptoms presented to them, receive workers compensation. (University of Sydney & the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2000)
- The World Health Organisation lists stress at work, as one of the top ten key determinants of poor health, and urges the OHS community to take action. (WHO: The Solid Facts, Professor Michael Marmot 2000 ref ACTU).

## Recognising stress in yourself

### Some of the most common stress symptoms:

- Lack of motivation
- Feelings of depression or anxiety
- Procrastination
- Loss of interest in life
- Feelings of being overwhelmed and unable to cope
- A drop in work performance
- An increase in sick days or absenteeism
- Presenteeism (being physically at work but mentally absent)
- Sleeping difficulties, such as insomnia
- Cognitive difficulties, such as a reduced ability to concentrate or make decisions
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Increased aggression

### How do you experience stress?

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## **Main causes of stress at work**

- Poor relationships with colleagues or bosses
- Lack of role clarity
- Long hours
- Heavy workload
- Lack of support or interest from managers
- Changes within the organisation
- Tight deadlines
- Changes to duties
- Job insecurity
- Lack of autonomy
- Boring work
- Insufficient skills for the job
- Over-supervision
- Inadequate working environment
- Lack of proper resources
- Few promotional opportunities
- Harassment
- Discrimination
- Crisis incidents, such as an armed hold-up or workplace death

## **Main causes of stress outside of work**

- Relationship issues
- Financial issues
- Loneliness
- Lack of direction
- Low self esteem / confidence

## Impact of long term stress

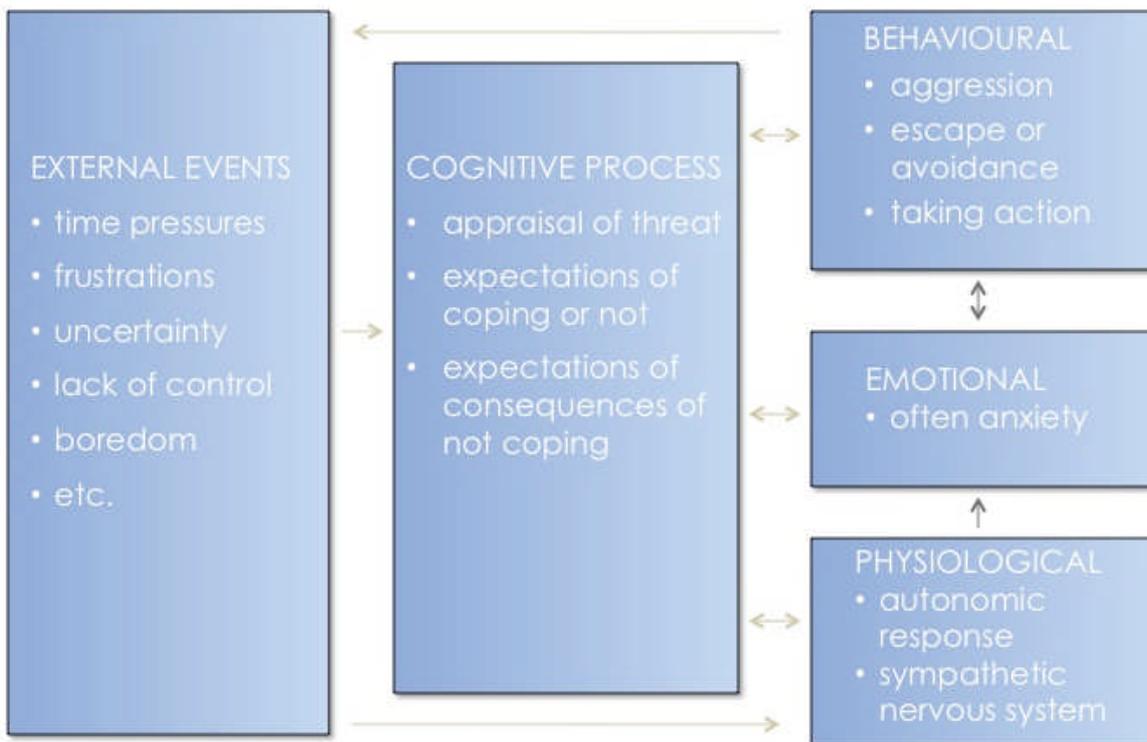
- Headache / migraine
- Sleeplessness / insomnia
- Impaired immune function
- Heart attack or stroke
- Weight loss / gain
- Allergies
- Digestive issues
- Mood swings
- Anxiety disorder
- Depression
- Substance abuse

# Understanding stress

## FIVE FACTOR STRESS MODEL

Stress is initially caused by an external event, which we respond to initially through our thought processes. In turn, we have a series of behavioural, emotional and physical responses which impact upon our thought processes. These responses affect the way we think and the way we react to the initial stressor.

## FIVE FACTOR STRESS MODEL



Source: 'You & Stress' Montgomery and Evans

## Understanding stress (continued...)

### FACTOR 1 - STRESSORS

The stress process begins with the source of stress or the stressor. Stress is an ongoing process and you will experience some form of stress at all times in your life.

Stress isn't only negative – in fact, without stress we would be dead. Thirst and hunger are forms of basic stress. Stress is simply a force that pressures us to do something. It is stress that motivates us to drink or eat or at a more complex level, to understand or know or create.

Manageable levels of stress get you going in life and help you to tackle life's tasks and problems. This positive stress is known as **eustress** and it is this that arouses us into action. An overload of stress from situations of prolonged under or over arousal leads to unpleasant feelings and eventually, physical damage and fatigue. This type of stress is known as **dystress**.

Common causes of dystress include time pressures, frustrations, demands, uncertainty, lack of control or lack of stimulation. It is as stressful to participate in boring and repetitive work where there is little chance for you to use your skills or creativity as it is to be overloaded with pressure.

### FACTOR 2 – THOUGHTS

The second factor is our cognitive or thought processes. These thought processes are characterised by the following elements:

- A stress is only a stress if you see it as one.
- Once you have decided a situation is a stressor you will have expectations about whether or not you can cope. This is affected by whether or not you are already in a state of dystress.
- If you think you can't cope with the stressor, you will have expectations of the negative consequences of not coping, which escalate your feelings of dystress.
- Unrealistic and exaggerated thinking play a major role in stress.

## Understanding stress (continued...)

### FACTOR 3 – PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES

1. **Alarm reaction** – the body’s response to the stressor. The body prepares for the ‘fight or flight’ response that was traditionally useful to man. Energy is made available to the systems that will manage such a response while taking energy away from other areas.
  - Heart rate and blood pressure increase
  - Muscles tense
  - Breath frequency changes
  - Perspiration increases
  - Slowing down of digestion
  - Reduction in effectiveness of immune system
2. **Resistance stage** – when we experience distress on a regular basis, our body tries to maintain this state of being. Because our bodies are geared toward a state of ‘homeostasis’ (the tendency that all living organisms have to keep themselves in a more or less constant state) the inclination is for our system to continue running at this higher rate.

The result of this is an increase in the production of hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline which over time, reduce our immune response and increase the risk of blood clots and hardened arteries. Modern medicine now acknowledges that there is a connection between emotional stress and physical wellness.

3. **Exhaustion stage** - if you don’t get rid of the stressors and you ignore the warning signs of stress, your body will eventually collapse. This is what we know to be a ‘nervous breakdown’.

### FACTOR 4 – EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

A growing body of research supports the theory that it is not the outside event that determines how you feel; it is how you think about the event.

## Understanding stress (continued...)

By practising your emotional response to a situation, eventually your conscious self talk changes and you are able to respond more effectively without thinking about it.

Our culture deals poorly with bad feelings. From an early age, we're told 'don't cry' or 'don't feel bad' which leads us to believe we need to avoid any feeling that isn't good. Learning to accept that bad feelings are just bad feelings and nothing more is an important step in the process.

### FACTOR 5– BEHAVIOURS

Our natural response to stress is 'fight or flight'. Fighting involves a variety of aggressive responses as well as the option of taking action.

**Aggressive responses** – ineffective, these involve violence - either actual or threatened, physical or emotional.

**Passive aggressive responses** – also ineffective, these include sulking, withdrawing from the conversation, ignoring the other person or not doing something you have said you will do.

**Action response** – responding in an assertive manner, taking action that helps you regain a sense of control, implementing measures to manage your physical and mental wellbeing.

**Flight response** - escaping or avoiding the situation, dodging the stressors.

### MONITORING YOUR STRESS LEVEL

Once you have an understanding of the elements of the stress process, it is useful way to observe your own response through all of the different stages.

### AND BE AWARE THAT...

- If you are already feeling angry, you are more likely to see a new stressor as further provocation.
- If you are feeling relaxed, you are better situated to cope with new demands.
- If you are physically run down or fatigued, you are more likely to feel overwhelmed at being asked to do something extra.
- If you feel confident of your ability to handle a situation, you expect yourself to be able to continue to handle it.

Stress is an ongoing process with each factor influencing the others. In order to manage stress

effectively, it is important to become aware of each of the elements that play a part in contributing to your stress levels.

## Stress assessment

How do you cope with stress? There are many ways, but some are more effective than others.

1. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 10 points if you feel you have supportive family around you.
2. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 10 points if you actively pursue a hobby.
3. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 10 points if you belong to a social or activity group in which you participate more than once a month.
4. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 15 points if you are within 5 kilos of your "ideal" body weight, considering your height and bone structure.
5. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 15 points if you practice some form of "deep relaxation" at least five times a week. Deep relaxation includes meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, imagery and yoga.
6. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 5 points for each time you exercise for 30 minutes or longer during an average week.
7. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 5 points for each nutritionally balanced and wholesome meal you eat during an average day. A nutritionally balanced meal is low in fat and high in vegetables, fruits and whole-grain products.
8. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 5 points if you do something you really enjoy and which is "just for you" during an average week.
9. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 10 points if you have a place in your home to which you can go to relax or be by yourself.
10. \_\_\_\_ Give yourself 10 points if you practice time management techniques daily.
11. \_\_\_\_ Subtract 10 points for each pack of cigarettes you smoke during an average day.
12. \_\_\_\_ Subtract 5 points for each evening during an average week that you use any form of medication or chemical substance, including alcohol, to help you sleep.
13. \_\_\_\_ Subtract 10 points for each day during an average week that you consume any form of medication or chemical substance, including alcohol, to reduce anxiety or just to calm down.
14. \_\_\_\_ Subtract 5 points for each evening during an average week that you bring work home – work meant to be done at your place of employment.

Now calculate your total score. A perfect score is 115...but remember, you're not aiming to be perfect. If you scored in the 50-60 range, you probably have adequate coping skills for most

common stress. However, keep in mind that the higher your score, the greater your ability to cope with stress in an effective, healthy manner.

Assessment created by Dr. George Everly Jr. of the University of Maryland

## **Five steps to manage stress:**

1. Create a foundation
2. Know your priorities
3. Ranking stressors
4. Change the way you think
5. Get support

# 1. Create a foundation

Managing stress effectively also includes prevention. Taking care of your health and wellbeing is the first step to help build your resilience.

## **EAT WELL**

Eat a healthy and balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, complex carbohydrates such as wholegrain breads etc. and protein. Drink at least two litres of water each day. Reduce your intake of coffee, alcohol, sugar, processed foods and saturated fats. Avoid diets – they often don't work and invariably leave us feeling deprived. Try instead to develop a friendly relationship with food and enjoy small portions of all of the foods that you love focusing on variety and food that is as close to its natural source as possible.

## **EXERCISE REGULARLY**

Research tells us that regular exercise can be as effective as a low dose of anti-depressant in helping to manage stress and anxiety. Make time to exercise at least three times each week, preferably doing something you enjoy that increases your heart rate for at least twenty minutes.

## **GET ENOUGH SLEEP**

A good night's sleep is essential not only for your physical wellbeing but to help you stay focused and calm. Good sleep habits include not having a television or computer in your bedroom; going to bed and waking at a regular time each day; minimising stimulants including coffee and alcohol and getting regular exercise.



TIP: Purchase a copy of the 'Sleep Better' program from <http://www.sleepbetter.com.au/>

## **LEARN TO RELAX**

Get away from your desk to eat lunch. Schedule a holiday each year and preferably, a couple of mini-breaks e.g. long weekends, in between. Where possible, switch your mobile phone and computer off at the end of your work-day to give yourself time to focus on other areas of your life.

# 1. Create a foundation (continued...)

## LEARN TO PHYSICALLY RELAX

Physically relaxing engages the parasympathetic nervous system (the system that calms you down) quieting the fight or flight response. When you are physically relaxed it's very difficult to feel stressed or upset.

### Try these simple exercises:

- Relax your tongue, eyes and jaw muscles
- Feel the tension draining out of your body and sinking down into the earth
- Run warm water over your hands
- Scan your body for areas that are tense and relax them

## LEARN TO MEDITATE

By far the most effective tool to reduce stress is meditation. Meditation is quite simply the practice using an 'object of focus' to help still the mind. Begin with either a mantra or the breath as your object and follow these steps to get you started.

- Bring your awareness to your mantra (try 'ohm' or 'release') or focus on your breath
- Create the right environment (turn off the phone, eliminate distractions as best you can)
- Adopt the correct posture (sitting, back straight, feet on the floor)
- Listen to your breathing and relax with each breath
- Hear your mantra repeated in your mind or simply focus on the breath
- When your thoughts distract you, let them go and return your focus to your meditation
- Don't worry if you're doing it right
- Meditate for twenty minutes, checking the time on a watch or clock
- Take your time coming out of your meditation
- Sit quietly at the completion of your meditation before resuming your activities



TIP: Download our 'Learn to Meditate' MP3 & PDF at [www.totalbalance.com.au/media/](http://www.totalbalance.com.au/media/)

## 2. Remember your priorities

At the beginning of each day, before turning your computer on or commencing any other activity, take half an hour to plan how you'll spend your day. Review your task list and clarify your priorities for the day. Review other commitments and think about how you can schedule time to achieve the most important objectives. Sometimes it helps to have an hour away from interruptions in order to concentrate.

## 3. Ranking stressors & responding appropriately

Before responding to a stressor take a moment to rank it. Will it have a long-term impact on your life? Is it really as bad as it seems?

Once you have ranked the stressor you can choose an appropriate response.

| Level 1<br>Short term, no long term impact  | Level 2<br>Short term, minor impact   | Level 3<br>Longer term, some impact   | Level 4<br>Long term, greater impact   | Level 5<br>Long term, significant impact  |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• caught in traffic</li> <li>• running late for a meeting</li> <li>• computer problems</li> <li>• cancelled train</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• receiving parking fine</li> <li>• conflicting demands at work/home</li> <li>• difference of opinion with colleague</li> <li>• difficulty meeting a deadline</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conflict with a colleague or friend</li> <li>• negative feedback at performance review</li> <li>• changing roles/jobs</li> <li>• money problems</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self or loved one being diagnosed with a serious illness</li> <li>• relationship breakdown</li> <li>• bankruptcy</li> <li>• suffering from depression/anxiety</li> <li>• losing your job</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• death of a loved one</li> <li>• diagnosis of terminal illness</li> </ul> |

## 4. Change the way you think

### CREATE PERSPECTIVE & AVOID CATASTROPHISING

Pay attention to how your attitude impacts your experience throughout the day – most happy people also consider themselves to be lucky and studies have shown this to be true because happy people see things differently so they have more positive experiences.

Creating perspective usually means taking the time to step back from what is going on and checking in about how bad it really is.

- Don't exaggerate bad feelings. Ask yourself – is there something constructive I can do to improve this situation? If there is – plan it or do it now. If not – do something physical - go for a walk, tidy your desk, exercise vigorously. Don't just sit there and think.
- Teach yourself to think rationally. Notice which irrational thoughts you default to (e.g. I must be liked by everyone) and train yourself to label by saying to yourself 'I'm thinking irrationally' and challenge those thoughts.

### CHANGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS: LIFE WILL BE TRICKY AT TIMES

Rather than trying to get rid of all of the challenges we face in life, accept that life will include some suffering. Many of the difficulties we face are made more problematic by our own responses to them.

- Accept that we will all run into one of life's 'D's sooner or later (divorce, disease, depression, debt, disaster, diagnosis, drought, dilemma, death)
- We will all have difficult feelings from time to time (e.g. anger, anxiety, sadness, hurt).
- Accept that you can cope with these feelings and remember that you have survived previous difficult feelings. It was unpleasant – but that's all. Create your own coping self-statement and practise it regularly. For example repeating to yourself, 'everything will be ok' can defuse some of your anxiety.



TIP: Read Rick Hanson's book 'Buddha's Brain'.

## 4. Change the way you think (continued...)

### DEFUSE DIFFICULT THOUGHTS WITH 'ACT' (ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT THERAPY)

We all have difficult thoughts from time to time. Acceptance & Commitment Therapy is a recent mindfulness-based behaviour therapy that helps people interact with difficult thoughts in a more flexible manner. This leads to great acceptance of such thoughts as well as improving our contact with the present moment. ACT teaches us about 'the observing self' and encourages us to understand our personal values so that we can use these to guide us toward workable action - even during times of difficulty.



TIP: Read Russ Harris' book 'The Happiness Trap' for more information.

### PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Martin Seligman, author of 'Authentic Happiness' created the **Three Blessings exercise** after his research found that focusing on what is good in your life has a lasting effect on your mood.

**At the end of each day write down three things that went well during your day. They might be very small or insignificant things.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



TIP: Read Martin Seligman's book 'Authentic Happiness' for more information.

## 4. Change the way you think (continued...)

### PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

The practice of ‘being in the moment’ is also known as ‘mindfulness’. Mindfulness means bringing the mind fully into the present so that we are completely engaged in what we are doing, thinking or feeling. It means paying attention to our thoughts, our emotions, feelings and our physical experiences as they happen and most importantly, without judgement.

If you can simply notice what’s going on around you as it happens you become fully present. It’s a simple philosophy but initially most people find this practice somewhat difficult. The most challenging aspect for most people is not judging your experiences as good or bad. The real key to mindfulness is to simply notice your experience and observe it with a friendly curiosity.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, often considered the father of mindfulness in the Western world, describes mindfulness as ‘the art of conscious living’. You don’t need to be a Buddhist to practise mindfulness – in fact one of the most important factors is to be yourself and not try to become anything that you are not already.

When we are willing to pay attention to all of our emotions and feelings – even the difficult ones that we would often rather avoid such as grief, sadness, anger and fear – we experience life more peacefully. Mindfulness also helps us to fully experience and appreciate joy, peacefulness and contentment.

Living more fully in the present moment doesn’t mean that we stop making plans for the future or that we cease any self-improvement. It requires a delicate balance between paying attention to our experience and noticing where we need to create change – mindfully. When we make our plans with awareness and without judgement, we have the freedom to listen to our intuition and make choices that are aligned with what we really value most in the world rather than being caught up in others’ expectations of us.



TIP: Jon Kabat-Zinn’s book ‘Wherever You Go, You Are There’.

## 5. Ask for help

- Depressed mood most of the day
- Less interest or pleasure in all activities
- Weight loss or gain (when not dieting)
- Sleeping difficulties
- Slowed or fastened movements
- Tiredness or loss of energy
- Feeling worthless
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death

Source: Beyond Blue <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>

## What will you do to create change?

*'The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.'* Lao Tzu

**What can you do within the next 24 hours to begin to create balance in your life?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_



## Getting the most from your workshop

For tips on managing stress and improving work life balance visit [www.totalbalance.com.au](http://www.totalbalance.com.au) and **subscribe to our monthly Total Balance newsletter** or the weekly inspiration quote, Revive, delivered to your inbox on a Monday morning.

### Further Reading:

- ‘Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’ by Stephen Covey
- ‘The Art of Possibility’ by Ben and Rosamund Zander
- ‘Authentic Happiness’ by Martin Seligman
- ‘Learned Optimism’ by Martin Seligman
- ‘The Resiliency Advantage’ by Al Siebert
- ‘Change Your Thinking’ by Sarah Edelman
- ‘Now Discover Your Strengths’ by Marcus Buckingham
- ‘Strengths Based Leadership’ by Tom Rath & Barry Conchie
- ‘The Power of Now’ by Eckhart Tolle (about being in the present moment)
- ‘The Happiness Trap’ by Russ Harris
- ‘ACT with Love’ by Russ Harris (good for partner relationships)
- ‘The Quiet’ by Paul Wilson (meditation)

### Support for anxiety and depression:

**Visit:** <http://www.beyondblue.org>

**Visit:** <http://www.lifeline.org.au>

### Relaxation MP3's available from our website:

- Increased Confidence
- Releasing Anxiety
- Peaceful Sleep
- Positive Thinking
- Learn to Meditate
- Inner Guide
- Stress Relief
- Self Acceptance

**Visit:** <http://totalbalance.com.au/media/>

### Details about workshops and retreats we run for the general public:

**Available from our website -** <http://www.totalbalance.com.au>