



Relieving the Pressure

Don't let practice stress ruin your life.

BY WILLIAM J. LYNOTT

You may not have thought much about it, but running your practice requires working in a dangerous environment. No, not physical danger—a different, more subtle kind of danger. It's the hidden stress inevitable in the life of every professional in practice, stress that is rampant in our society today, stress that can accumulate to the point of serious damage in both your business and personal life.

How common are stress-related problems? “Up to 80 percent of visits to primary care physicians are for symptoms directly or indirectly related to stress response,” says Vicki Rackner, MD, co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. “While it’s true that we live in a stress-filled world, you can control your response to stressful stimuli. Manage your response to stress more effectively and you will have a happy, healthy heart. You will also have a healthier bottom line.”

How do you know if the pressure cooker of daily business is having a harmful effect on you? “Some of the danger signals are weight gain, men-

tal confusion, depression, suppressed immune function, and constant fatigue and insomnia,” says nutritional biochemist Shawn M. Talbott, PhD. Getting stress under control can help in each of these areas.

Here are seven tips that will help you to avoid the severe and often permanent harm to you and those around you that can result from uncontrolled business stress:

However, if you don't have the resources for outsourcing, chances are you'll wind up doing it yourself. That often means doing it poorly, further straining your resources.”

What to do about this? “First, organize and prioritize the bewildering flurry of competing demands on your time, being sure to include key functions such as cash flow and marketing,” says Stroup.

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Analyze and Organize Those Competing Demands on Your Time

Among the major causes of stress in running a business or professional practice are incompatible demands on the owner's time and resources, according to management consultant and author Jim Stroup. “If you don't have the time or expertise to do a given task, you should outsource it.

“Next, analyze these tasks on the basis of their impact on your time and resources—which ones have the biggest impact on your success and which can be delegated or outsourced.”

This simple procedure often helps an owner to a better understanding of the business side of things, according to Stroup. In turn, that reduces

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the stress resulting from a failure to understand how to deal with stress.

Know When It's Time to Quit

"Learn how to turn off work and boot up life," says consultant Jennifer

"Take heart." says Liz Bywater, Ph.D., president of Bywater Consulting Group, LLC. "Vacation need not be an all-or-nothing approach to relaxation. There's no need to divorce yourself entirely from your business in order to recharge your batteries."

Dr. Bywater says there's noth-

close friends and family provide the support that helps us cope with a business downturn or other negative event," she says.

One of the most effective things professionals can do to combat stress is to build a balanced network that supports not only their practice but also their personal lives, according to Hurlbert. "They also need to remember that even close ties dwindle if they're not maintained. That's why they need to devote time and energy to the personal side of their networks, just as they do for the business side."

"Learn how to turn off work and boot up life."

—Kalita

Kalita, founder of The Kalita Group. "Entrepreneurs often start businesses to get out from under an unreasonable boss, but now the only unreasonable bosses they're working for are themselves. Make a commitment to business hours and stick to it. If you don't, the line between your business and your personal life will become blurred. When that happens, it isn't the business that will suffer; it's you, your family and friends—all the things you need to keep your life in balance."

Dr. Rackner agrees on the importance of turning off work. "The stress-induced fight-or-flight response served our species well when we faced saber-toothed tigers," she says. "In business it often feels like a pack of tigers are right outside the door. Adrenalin and other stress hormones help you run away from danger or face challenges square on."

According to Dr. Rackner, stress-induced adrenalin becomes problematic when we use it as fuel for day-to-day activities. "Our bodies are designed for surges of adrenalin, not the day-in, day-out, sustained-release stress program followed by so many professionals. That impairs not only the body's ability to function; it also impairs business productivity and profitability."

You Know That You Need a Vacation ... But

You know how important it is to take some time for yourself and your family. You've been working hard and now you need to refresh and renew. However, if you're like many professionals in practice, the idea of walking away from business for even a day or two causes so much anxiety that it's hardly worth it.

ing wrong with dedicating a small portion of each vacation day—even if it's just a couple of minutes—to checking in. "If you absolutely must speak briefly to an employee, or any business contact, so be it. Hey, one phone call could pay for your whole vacation. "Once your daily check-in is finished, you can put away your smartphone and laptop for the day and have some fun."

Enlist Outside Help

"It's not unusual for professionals to feel they have to do everything themselves," says Dr. Bywater. "Sometimes it's about keeping as much money as possible in the practice and minimizing expenses. Sometimes it's about quality control. You may think that if you want the job done right, you have to do

"Our close friends and family provide the support that helps us cope with a business downturn or other negative event."—Hurlbert

Lean on Your Friends

"Entrepreneurs, working in a constantly-changing and often uncertain environment, must deal with a host of stresses," says Jeanne Hurlbert, PhD, Professor of Sociology at Louisiana State University. "Although many fail to realize it, one of their most valuable resources in coping with that stress is their social networks."

According to Dr. Hurlbert, entrepreneurs generally think of "networking" as building business contacts. "While it's important that entrepreneurs' social networks provide those resources, it's at least as important that their networks provide the social support that can help them reduce stress and cope with stress that they cannot eliminate."

Hurlbert feels that professionals in practice should recognize that the contacts who provide that kind of support generally aren't the same individuals who provide referrals. "Our

it yourself, but that's not so. True, there are many aspects of any small business that are best handled by the owner, but there's also plenty of room in most businesses for effective outsourcing."

In order to focus on what you do best, you must take some things off your plate, according to Dr. Bywater. "That may mean such things as hiring a reliable supervisor, or a top-notch bookkeeper. The key is to farm out the kinds of work that take up lots of your time but don't fall within your areas of expertise. Do what you do best. Have others do the rest."

Make Sure That You and Your Significant Other Are on the Same Page

"If your home life isn't running smoothly, you're headed for stressville," says Steve Kaplan, author of *Be the Elephant: Build a Bigger, Better Business*. "Do everything you can to

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help your spouse understand your professional life. He or she can be a big help or a barrier to keeping a lid on your stress level.”

Kaplan feels that finding ways to involve your family is an important weapon in the fight to control business stress. “The last thing most of us want to do after a hard day is to rehash everything,” he says. “Still, you need to remember that the person who hasn’t been with you during your workday needs to feel connected.”

Involving family members in your life lets them know that you value their thoughts and it helps them to be more understanding during those missed dinners and birthday parties. That, in turn, will help you to keep stress under control, says Kaplan.

Reduce Your Own Importance

You’ve heard it said many times—if you want something done

right, do it yourself. It’s a classic philosophy with an undeniable grain of poetic truth. However, when it comes to running a professional practice, too many owners suffer from a dangerous overdose of do-it-yourself-itis.

“Every entrepreneur has three basic responsibilities,” says Andy Birol, founder of Birol Growth Consultants. “They are owner, president, and chief sales person. No owner can do everything effectively in all three of these areas.”

According to Birol, entrepreneurs tend to be “control freaks.” “It’s difficult for many to entrust business responsibilities to others,” he says. “However, it’s critically important to develop the ability to delegate some of your work to those around you. The penalty for a failure to do that is an almost certain buildup of the kind of business stress that will eventually impose a harsh penalty on both the business and the business owner.”

Every expert interviewed for this article ranked the failure to delegate as a major cause of harmful stress. While it may seem difficult, reducing your own importance is a major step in easing the day-to-day pressures.

Of course, these seven suggestions aren’t the only techniques for minimizing the constant strains in your professional life, but together they can go a long way toward reducing your exposure to the damage of uncontrolled stress. **PM**



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