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Introduction

From the moment we are born, we are under pressure – to take our first steps, to learn to read and write, to do well at school/college/university, to find a job, to buy a home, and to have a decent burial when we kick the proverbial bucket – the pressures in life are endless!

Are you stressed and unable to cope? Are members of your team showing signs of excessive stress? This book is designed to give you an insight into stress and how others under pressure have coped. It’s intended for anyone looking to cope more efficiently in the workplace, whether you’re junior, middle, or senior management. We are confident it will make you think more positively about your own pressures, to be more resilient, and to encourage others in your team and organization to be more resilient. You’ll get expert advice from people in high-pressure jobs and situations, and be able to find out how they manage to cope with extremely stressful situations in the workplace and achieve the right balance between work and home life, an essential requirement for anyone in business.

This is not a self-help book (there are enough of them already). Instead, we give you a fascinating insight into “life at the top” by carrying out interviews with successful businessmen and women, and others in high pressure jobs, who have managed to achieve success despite setbacks and other obstacles – everyone has different ways of tackling stress in the workplace. You’ll be able to find out about various coping strategies, and how our high profile interviewees got to where they are today.
Identifying stress and its costs

Stress has found as firm a place in our modern lexicon as iPads, social media, and junk food. We use the term casually to describe a wide range of symptoms resulting from our hectic pace of life. “I feel stressed,” someone says to describe a vague yet often acute sense of distress. “He’s under a lot of stress,” we say when trying to understand a colleague’s irritability. “It’s a high-stress job,” someone else will say, awarding an odd sort of prestige to his or her occupation. But to those whose ability to cope with day-to-day matters is at crisis point, the concept of stress is no longer a casual one.

Pressure is stimulating and motivating, but when pressure exceeds your ability to cope, you are in the stress zone.

Stress and the consequent mental ill health affects nearly one in four of the working population, and over the years has become the leading cause of sickness absence in the workplace. The Centre for Mental Health has estimated the direct costs of sickness absence, presenteeism (going to work ill and contributing little value to the service or product) and labor turnover was £26b per annum. In addition, stress and mental ill health represent roughly 40% of all incapacity benefit in the UK, at nearly £5b a year.

Stress comes in a variety of forms, from behavioral symptoms to physical symptoms to ill health outcomes (not only mental ill health, but also as a risk factor in a range of physical conditions). When the pressure exceeds the individual’s ability to cope, the first symptoms are behavioral (e.g. losing your sense of humor, constant irritability with people, constant tiredness, suppressed anger, difficulty making decisions, difficulty concentrating). The next phase is where the individual displays physical symptoms (e.g. insomnia, lack of appetite or excessive craving for food, headaches, nausea, frequent indigestion or heartburn, non-specific aches and pains). And finally, if the original underlying sources of the stress persist, and an individual’s coping strategies aren’t working effectively, they can turn into risk factors for a range of illnesses (e.g. depression/anxiety, heart disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, immune system disorders).
This book will show you ways of dealing with stress quickly and effectively in order to prevent it leading to mental health issues and a possible breakdown, by drawing on the experiences of people in stressful jobs who have (or have had) to cope with enormous pressure. They include a bomb disposal expert in his ceaseless battle against terrorism in some of the most dangerous places on earth, and a surgeon who performed a ground-breaking operation with a specialist team to separate twins who were joined at the head.

Most of the interviewees are successful businessmen and women, including Dame Mary Perkins, who with her husband Doug founded the highly successful company Specsavers, which secured them a place in the *Sunday Times* Rich List. Other high-profile subjects in the book include Frederick Forsyth, international bestselling author; Chris Bonington, world-famous mountaineer, explorer, and writer; Jeff Banks, international fashion designer; and Ken Hom, international celebrity chef, author, and television presenter. Discover how they achieved international success and overcame stress and setbacks. Here are a few quotes from some of our high-profile interviewees – read their full interviews in the book.

Focus, commitment, and discipline are at the heart of my stress management program, and if you rigorously, relentlessly, and joyfully implement these, you never lose the ability to cope. Stress, worry, regret, pain, and guilt are all emotions that must be managed, reduced, or eliminated and replaced with positive behaviors.

*Kevin Roberts,*

*CEO Worldwide, Saatchi & Saatchi*

Stress is part of life! The key is to act promptly to avoid a build-up. My strategies for dealing with stress: (1) Exercise each morning – it clears the mind; (2) Discuss any issues with personal and business partners – they include my wife, business partner, lawyer, accountant, and clients; and (3) Deal with issues promptly and work to avoid build-up.

*Gale D. Metzger,*

*Former Co-Founder & President of Statistical Research, Inc.*

In the surreal high-stakes, high-pressure world I was living in, where every decision could have been my last, I grew to learn that fear can be
your friend. Confucius once said: “Our greatest glory is not in never fail-
ing, but in rising each time we fail.” He was bang-on. Instead of allowing
fear to curtail success, you can use it to give you an edge. Visualizing a
successful outcome and learning breathing-techniques also helped!

Major Chris Hunter,
Former bomb disposal expert, author, and broadcaster

The author team consists of journalist Brian Claridge, who came up with
the idea for the book and conducted the interviews, and psychologist
Cary Cooper, who provides expert analyses to explain the lessons to be
learnt in each case, as well as giving expert advice on some of the best
ways of coping with stress in the workplace.

Here are just a few of the valuable management tips in the book, which
are highlighted in the Conclusion section:

- Be flexible. In order to cope with all the stresses and strains of pressured
  jobs, we need to adapt to everything that is thrown at us in the work-
  place and in life. We need to get away from a rigid mentality and behav-
  ioral set, epitomized by this humorous quote from Samuel Goldwyn “I’m
  willing to admit that I may not always be right, but I am never wrong.”
- Share your concerns with someone you trust, whether a partner/
  spouse, close friend, or family member. Keeping problems repressed
  is an unhealthy coping strategy. This is closely allied to seeking social
  support if you need it, rather than trying to be a macho man/woman.
  It is all too easy in business to hide your problems behind a veneer of
  self-confidence, a problem which in the end can eat away at you and
  cause serious health problems.
- Never look back and say “I wish I had” or “I should have.” Learn from
  your mistakes but don’t dwell on them. The people who get ahead
  in life are those that have a “bounce-back” mentality. They say “I have
  failed, I will learn from this,” and then get on with the next venture
  without wallowing in the failure.

Learn from “real life experience” how to:

- Cope with the pressures of the workplace.
- Overcome obstacles.
• Deal with difficult people in the workplace.
• Get self-motivated.
• Face life’s challenges.
• Establish a goal.
• Cope with failure.
• Avoid work taking over your private life.
• Embrace changes at work, rather than fight them.
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