

BizTips: Creating happier, more productive days

BY DR. NANCY D. O'REILLY, SPECIAL TO THE DAILY BUSINESS BUZZ
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It doesn't take Monday morning traffic to cause extreme frustration at work. It can even be things as small as a co-worker showing up to a meeting late, or a client calling to cancel his latest order, or the coffee pot being empty in the break room.

Unfortunately when you don't handle your anger and frustration in a constructive way, it tends to build up. As your stress levels rise, you tend to be less productive, thus finding it harder to concentrate or multitask. Eventually those high levels of stress can take their toll and lead to burn out. The solution is to manage your frustration and stress properly and quickly so that it doesn't get in the way of a productive workday.

Here are some tips for handling frustrating situations in the office and beyond.

1. Start off with some affirmations to help you get through the frustration. Here are a few affirmations to help you increase your tolerance of stressful situations. Think of these and say them to yourself the next time you find yourself upset. In the long run, it is more satisfying to take the more challenging route, than to take the easier and less disciplined approach. I am happiest when I work on long-term, challenging projects in which I work against inertia and take risks. While I may have to do many things that are difficult, unpleasant or boring, they are almost never impossible to accomplish. In order to achieve pleasant results, I often have to do challenging things. Yes, it is a pain to do this now, but I'll be able to accomplish so much more than by waiting to do it later.

2. Follow up with a "workout" that will get you moving – at least your endorphins. Although it doesn't seem like a typical fitness program, laughing gives your body a great workout and releases endorphins, which can improve your mood, focus and energy. Even though you may not work up an actual sweat or earn a medal in competition, laughing brings great benefits. So, keep a humorous book on your desk, sign up for a daily knock-knock joke, or just find something amusing to think about during the next frustrating situation.

Pump up the oxygen. One of the ways exercise builds energy is by forcing you to breathe deeply. Each in-breath, or "inspiration," brings fresh oxygen into your body. Laughter does the same thing. Notice that you can't laugh long without having to take a breath. Your brain gets fresh oxygen and you feel great. The deep breathing that comes with a good laugh will also force you to relax.

Pump up your muscles. Working out when you feel tense is a tried and true way to relieve stress and tension in your muscles and your mind. Laughing does the same thing with a lot less effort! Notice how your muscles relax after you laugh.

Turn on the neurotransmitters. Scientists suspect that laughing resembles exercise in another positive way. When you exercise, your body produces "Happy Hormones" that make you feel great. Norepinephrine makes you feel energetic, endorphins cheer you up, and serotonin helps you feel less tense. It appears that laughing may release these hormones too.

Make it all part of a game. One of the reasons tribal healers often wear wild outfits and perform entertaining antics is to make people laugh. Ancient wisdom taught that laughter and fun on a regular basis keeps people healthy. Organizations that take time for recreation, games and fun also learn that relieving tension helps groups make better decisions.

3. Sometimes it takes a bigger change to notice a difference. By implementing just a few of the following lifestyle changes, you will be able to reduce stress and frustration levels. Here are some suggestions:

Research shows that companion animals, like dogs, cats, rabbits, and birds, help people live longer and healthier lives. Health benefits of having a pet include lower blood pressure, decreased stress, reduced bone loss, lowered cholesterol levels, and improved circulation.

A companion animal also adds new meaning to the life of a person living alone. The pet offers unconditional love and commitment to its owner. It can act as a friend, therapist, entertainer, and warm, fuzzy, bundle of joy.

Take up a hobby or something you enjoy. By trying new things or opening your mind to

new experiences, you're bound to find something that resonates with your personality and boosts your confidence.

Find yourself running out of time? On your list of things to do, cross off something you don't enjoy and let someone else do it (they just might enjoy it)

Create support systems. Learn to confide in your friends and family members during particularly stressful times. Also look into support groups, meet-ups and social activities that will introduce you to new people and create new friendships. Make an effort to get to know the people you work with; there may be someone at the office you can relate to with more than just office talk.

Find a place or activity that's stress-free. For some people, walking their dog, going to the park or just being outdoors helps. For others, going to the library or museum can be a stress-reliever. Whatever it is, find that place that allows you to be "you" in a peaceful, stress-free way.

Help someone else. Become a mentor or volunteer for a community organization. By helping someone else in need, you'll realize your own problems are very small in comparison – plus you'll feel great about the help you can provide!

Meditate, pray or open your mind to spirituality. Studies have shown that meditation techniques can greatly reduce stress. An added bonus is you can meditate anywhere! In your car, while sitting in traffic, or in the privacy of your office during a lunch break. It only takes a few minutes to silence your mind and find peace.

When you take the time to understand and overcome the stress in these frustrating situations, you can really improve your emotional and physical well-being. Not only will you improve your mood and your health, but your productivity and energy will also make the office a better place to be.

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Steve Wilson from Ohio writes: There has never been a better time to take advantage of the therapeutic benefits of laughter. Laughter and humor are natural antagonists to stress, and they are alternatives to violence. There has never been a greater need to touch people's lives, to make people laugh, and to make this world a better place to live in. An excellent resource for quality programs and information on this topic is www.worldlaughter.com. A distinguished panel of experts on the science of humor & laughter guides the creation of quality programs that are beneficial in a variety of settings. Sign up for the free electronic newsletter. Read the News & Events page. LAUGHTER IS CONTAGIOUS; THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO START AN EPIDEMIC!

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