

# Personal Excellence

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First Lady

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a 'Stop Doing' List

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Capt. Sully Sullenberger

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"Personal Excellence is the only reading you'll need to do for continual self-improvement both personally and professionally!"

—Sharlene Hawkes, Former Miss America, award-winning ESPN broadcaster

# De-Stress for Success

*Cultivate a healthy attitude.*



by Ken Vanderlip  
and Susie  
Vanderlip

**I**N THESE TRYING TIMES, YOU MAY BE FEELING more confusion, anxiety, worry and fear as questions flood into your mind daily: *Will I be laid off next? Will my company go bankrupt? Will I get a paycheck? Will I be able to take care of my family? Will I ever be able to retire? How can I live with this uncertainty?*

These questions and emotions lead to high stress. Stress represents many emotions, but all these emotions boil down to one root emotion—fear.

This emotional element can begin to permeate your life and reduce your commitment, goals, and motivation. Left unnoticed and unprocessed, fear can lead you to hunker down into self-preservation and adopt a “What’s in it for me?” attitude. Fear gives rise to critical attitudes, judging and blaming others, and gossip. When you have fearful feelings, you tend to do whatever it takes to find relief.

You need to *de-stress for success*. This marks the difference between a motivational meltdown and a positive attitude that makes it safe to identify the feelings and fears and provide options for relief.

**1. Get out of denial.** Acknowledge that stress and feelings of fear are present and that the fear may mutate into anger, rage, lethargy, depression, arguments, withdrawal, defensiveness, mistakes, accidents, or controlling behavior. That is the power of fear. You and others are influenced by these feelings; underlying every decision you make are your feelings and emotions, most particularly, fear. In fact, the first information the brain uses to make decisions is emotion—before your critical thinking and analytical abilities come into play. Hence, many people react to the emotions before thinking. So, acknowledge emotions without judgment, and respond appropriately.

**2. Process your stress and fear.** Stress—and the uncomfortable emotions it incites—can be managed in healthy ways. However, our society promotes escaping feelings rather than processing them. Many escapes are available, but most

come with serious consequences—alcohol and drug dependence and abuse, irresponsible sexuality, violence against others, violence against ourselves, obsessions with food, and gambling. You can’t choose such options without having it affect your attitude and productivity. Such escapes impact work: increases in absenteeism, health care costs, and accidents; reduced productivity, poor communication, and ineffective interactions. Denying or avoiding emotions and stress does not resolve them—it just covers them up. In the long run, emotion will impact judgment. And fear may even cause you to subterfuge your own success. So, seek help in processing and coping with stress and fearful emotions. *Make*



*a proactive choice to prevent problems before they start.* You may know that you are stressed, but feel that you can’t afford the time to learn how to manage the stress. It may also be avoidance, since you just want a quick fix—a drink, a pill, or a half-gallon of ice cream. Learn, instead, to stay positive and seek creative solutions to your problems.

**3. Note the feelings behind your stress and experience tools and practice techniques that relieve your stress.** You can approach stress management by addressing the body, mind, or spirit. Some people are more kinesthetic—they relate to the world through physical and sensory systems; others relate through thought and analysis; and others are more intuitive, spiritual, and emotionally sensitive. Each style contributes strength as well as challenge.

For example, here are some options:

- *The Body.* Learn such things as simple yoga, breathing techniques, and progressive muscle relaxation. These physical activities change brain chemistry and provide a sense of calm; they

help you stay focused in the present rather than fearful in the future; and they change thinking patterns from fear to acceptance, sense of safety, and a calmer, more creative mind and positive attitude that enables you to focus on a problem and find creative solutions.

- *The Mind.* Learn *reframing skills* and *positive self-talk tools*. Many people have self-critical thinking, especially if they’ve had any degree of abuse, critical parenting or neglect in childhood. *Subconscious patterns* of blaming others or feeling shame and guilt for being at fault can exist. This translates into controlling others and straining relationships; criticizing others and causing arguments or resistance to cooperation; taking on too many responsibilities and feeling victimized by people or circumstances.

## Three Reframing Skills

To learn new ways to look at situations and gain a more positive perspective, practice three reframing skills:

**1. HALT:** Positive attitudes begin with taking care of your physical and emotional needs. HALT is an acronym: H = Too Hungry, A = Too Angry, L = Too Lonely, or T = Too Tired. Most people work through physical and emotional discomfort, leading to agitation, misinterpretation, and poor judgment. Take responsibility for addressing these conditions. Since physical needs (such as hunger or fatigue) can exacerbate your emotions, deal with them first. You might: *eat; take a short break; talk or write out your anger; ask “What am I afraid of?” call a trusted colleague or friend.*

**2. Acknowledge the things you are doing right.** Make a list at night of things you did right during your day. Even if the day is filled with seemingly trivial tasks, you’ll gain a greater sense of accomplishment and encouragement until greater success occurs.

**3. Learn not to take what other people say and do personally.** Others are acting upon emotions, too; and their feelings may be motivated by things that have nothing to do with you. So, choose not to react in defensiveness or anger. If they vent anger, ask if they have a solution. Help them see they have choices.

As a leader, you must be the first to acknowledge your feelings and to take positive actions to release *stress* and *fear*. That sets the tone for others, and your decisions and interactions will be more positive, encouraging and honest. **PE**

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**ACTION:** *Destress your life to perform effectively.*