

Huffington

Managing Everyday Stress Three Keys to Personal Power

We all face potentially stressful situations every day. Why do some of us spring immediately to “fight or flight” while others just seem to “go with the flow?” Are some of us geared to not sweat the small stuff and to see that, in perspective, it’s almost all small stuff?

I heard about a young English teacher who was writing an assignment on the chalkboard for her class of twenty-two seventh-grade students. When the second hand on the wall clock reached 12, all the students in the class dropped their large literature books on the floor at the same time just to get a reaction from the teacher. Only two days earlier, a math teacher subjected to the same prank had had a “mini-breakdown.” However to the surprise and chagrin of the class, the teacher continued writing without any visible reaction. When she had finished writing, the teacher walked to her desk, picked up her copy of the text book, held it high, and dropped it to the desk. She looked at her class, smiled, and said, “Sorry I was late.”

The students left class that day thinking and talking about what had happened. How did the teacher remain so calm in the midst of chaos? What was her secret and what did she know that most others did not?

Here are three keys that may help you deal with potential stress.

Key 1, Exercise Response-Ability

Professor Susan Whitbourne at the University of Massachusetts said in [Psychology Today](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201111/dont-let-lifes-hassles-get-you-down) [http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201111/dont-let-lifes-hassles-get-you-down] that the way for you to handle life’s everyday hassles is to manage your emotions. She said:

“You may not be able to change the situation that caused your stress, but you can change your reactions. Looking for the silver lining, seeing humor in your predicament, or regarding the situation as a test of your faith are all ways that you can manage your emotions and get through even the most stressful hassle.”

The young teacher *chose* not to let the book-dropping incident disrupt her morning. She simply yet gently deflected the interruption and maintained her agenda.

Many people let hassles in daily life set their mood for the rest of the day or week. They give away their personal power by blaming their mothers, their bosses, the weather, their customers, and even the devil. This victim-like mentality simply makes an event into a problem. While it is true that external events *contribute* to our degree of stress, they do not *cause* it. The events we become stressed over, the degree of our stress, the amount of time we remain stressed and the ways we manage stress are largely a matter of *choice*. It is our response-ability.

Key 2, Don't Take It Personally

The Greek philosopher Epictetus said, "People are not disturbed by things, but by the views they take of them."

Many people approach the ever changing and competitive business climate by taking every encounter personally. Such a view only triggers emotions of hurt, anger and depression. What if I told you that my career life goal is to become a major league baseball umpire? And then admitted to you that I hate conflict, am extremely sensitive to negative feedback, and tend to get my feelings hurt easily. You know that by the third inning, I would be an emotional basket case.

Almost any walk of life contains its share of hassles. We can accept this fact without liking it. We can take such incidents seriously without taking them personally.

Key 3, Maintain Your Sense of Humor

In April 1999, Atlanta firefighter Matt Mosely was dangling precariously from a helicopter cable, straining to reach a man trapped at the top of a 250-foot crane. Wind-driven flames threatened to engulf the crane and the operator who had climbed to the top in an effort to save his life. At the height of that life-threatening, excruciatingly tense moment, Mosely shouted down to the man, "Your boss sent me up so that you could knock off early."

Later, after the rescue operation had brought both men down safely, Mosely said of his comment to the man, "That helped lighten things up a little bit." News Story on CBS [<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/amazing-rescue-in-atlanta/>]

By remaining playful, the teacher in my opening story taught her class more than English literature. The students learned that when someone tries to "pull your strings," you have a *choice* in how you respond. Don't take incidents personally. And Don't ever lose your sense of humor.

The bottom line is that you have a choice in how you respond to those inevitable hassles of life. And your response can make all the difference in your life and the lives of those around you.