Seven stress solutions for mentally-resilient work teams

Susan Comfort
VUCA world

Volatile Uncertain Complex Ambiguous
100% of humans experience stress. 30-60% experience anxiety or depression. 15% of U.S. adults are diagnosed (a/d).

These 7 social stress solutions can help.
Some Stress Less

The more layers, the more stress

Nonprofit worker, Low-income, Female, Person of color, LGBTQ, Chronic illness, Immigrant, Caretaker, Religious minority, ACE exposure, Secondary trauma …
STRESS IS NATURAL

How do we react to stress?

How do you “complete your stress cycle?” (Nagoski twins, Burnout)
Do you know the language of your autonomic nervous system?

Develop Your Stress Rx
Lower cortisol = fewer health problems
WE’RE PREDICTABLE

We experience daily cycles of mood, stress and productivity.

Dan Pink says “2:55 pm is the least productive time of day”

Goal: to be in calm, receptive, safe mode most of the time.
3 NERVOUS SYSTEM MODES

“Fight or flight”  Hyper-arousal; Stress, no learning

“Rest & Digest” or “Safe & Social”  Comfort Zone, where learning can happen

“Freeze”  Hypo-arousal; Numb, no learning
SPEAKING OUR OWN LANGUAGE

Use “tactical” or “box” breathing.

Breathing speaks the language of your nervous system.
STRESS-RELIEF SKILLS TO PRACTICE

- Visual, perform or crafty arts
- Listening/playing music
- Sleep / Rest
- Taking breaks in nature
- Planning vacations
- Pleasure principle
- Friendship
- Laughter / Smiling
- Exercise
- Dance
- Hydration
- Nutrition
- Animal love
- Family / Kids
- Mindful practice
- Play / Joy
- Spirituality
- Gratitude
**Medication PRESCRIPTION**

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1. LAUGHTER

Strengthens immunity, and your core.

Creates endorphins, which lower cortisol, even when you’re faking it.

Endorphins also block physical pain, and ward off anxiety & depression.
2. SPIRITUALITY, GRATITUDE

Invoke the relaxation response.

Spiritual communities are social & connect us to values/purpose.

Gratitude re-wires our “negativity bias.”
“THE BRAIN IS LIKE VELCRO FOR NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES, AND TEFLON FOR POSITIVE ONES.”

-- Dr. Rick Hanson
STRESS-RELIEF SKILLS TO PRACTICE

3. FRIENDS & FAMILY

Who’s in your Lifeboat?

GetLifeboat.com
4. EXERCISE/DANCE

Effective in combating mild depression.

W/ buddy: you show up, go longer, go harder, and have more fun.

After 20 minutes of Sitting Quietly

After 20 minutes of Walking

Reprinted with permission of Dr. C. H. Hillman.
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5. ADDICTIVE DISTRACTIONS

- Smartphones
- Alcohol
- Other drugs
- All can be addictive, unhealthy, and distracting. But tolerance is personal.

Photo by @AnnieSpratt
STRESS-RELIEF SKILLS TO PRACTICE

6. BREAKS, VACATIONS, NATURE

5-minute breaks: “Take Five” talk

Plan-ticipate your vacations!

Get Vitamin N, or “shinrin-yoku”
STRESS-RELIEF SKILLS TO PRACTICE

7. PET LOVE

Mental & physical health

Power of touch

Unconditional love
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Get Curious

1. How are you taking care of yourself?
2. Will this be a walking meeting?
3. Did you take a break yet today?
4. How can I support you?
5. What do you do for your mental health?
6. What makes you laugh?

Get Coaching

1. Hire Comfort Consulting, or other coaches
2. Help each other (say “I need some coaching”)
1. Box breathe… and adjust as needed.
2. Laugh! (Fake it ‘til you make it!)
3. Practice spirituality & gratitude
4. Exercise with others
5. Focus on a few friends & family
6. Avoid addictive distractions
7. Take breaks/vacations; enjoy nature
8. Love on those pets
Polyvagal theory
WHY THIS?

We want to bring our best selves to work.

Strong relationships matter for mental health (and at work they prevent turnover).

Culture of well-being supports teams, builds relationships, prevents burnout/turnover.