



Is Stress Managing You or Are You Managing Stress?

The discussion in a Stress Management class I was teaching last week revealed some common misconceptions about stress and the vast differences in individual beliefs about how much control we actually have over the stress in our lives. The greatest misconception about stress was that stress is always negative. Most participants became convinced that we have more tools available for coping with stress than ever before. However, a few wanted to cling to the notion that we have no control over the tremendous stress we face today.

Stress is often described as the response of the body to any demand. We often think of stress as a negative force which drains our mental and physical resources. However, stress research has shown that, within limits that are different for each of us, stress is a positive ingredient of life that stimulates growth and change and nurtures the creative process.

The critical difference between positive and negative stress lies in the way we perceive and deal with each potentially stressful situation. Stress management is simply effective coping and is a learned process.

Stress will always be a factor in our lives, so we need to find ways to deal with it before it leads to burnout. When and how you deal with stress is the key to daily management.

Stress management research provides a wide array of techniques for coping with stress through better management of time and energy, developing physical stamina, relaxation, increased mental stamina, etc. Most people I work with experience tremendous stress, but we cannot begin managing stress until we believe that we can take charge of our lives.

Life Law #7 from Dr. Phil McGraw's book **Life Strategies** says that life is managed, not cured. In the December 2003 issue of **The Next Level**, the story of world-renowned cyclist Lance Armstrong's triumph over cancer and unprecedented success in the Tour de France is given to illustrate the importance of internal dialogue during stressful times. Although Lance had less than a 50% chance of survival and close to a 0% chance of ever competing again, he considered his cancer a wake-up call and refused to give in.

In **The Power of Full Engagement**, Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz suggest that instead of trying to eliminate stress or stormy periods in our life, we should use them and recognize them as our best times for growth. Just as stressing a muscle will cause it to grow stronger, we can use stress to help us get stronger and live more purposefully.

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“In every difficult situation is potential value. Believe this, then begin looking for it.”

--Norman Vincent Peale

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