

A Dozen Suggestions to Keep Stress Under Control

Leadership is often a heavy burden to carry. Added responsibilities, organizational demands, follower concerns, and the need to maintain a productive focus can generate high levels of anxiety, worry, and stress. Of course not all stress is bad. In fact leaders need some degree of stress to keep them creative and competitive. It is when stress becomes toxic that a leader's performance and well-being suffers.

Below are a dozen things that leaders can do to manage stress effectively:

1. **Prioritize.** Put your work in priority order and then work on the high priority items first. Avoid spending a disproportionate amount of time and energy on tasks that are less important. It may be helpful to have a simple rating system where you assess the priority level of each work item. Base this system on some standard criteria that is important to your position.
2. **Sort.** Weed out those tasks and efforts that are no longer productive. In other words, don't keep adding to your list of responsibilities without freeing up time by removing or reducing what you currently do.
3. **Delegate.** Remember that a good leader knows how to delegate effectively. In short, you don't have to do everything yourself. Review your work and if something can be done efficiently by someone else, delegate. Be certain that you adhere to sound delegation principles: task clarity, articulated expectations, check for understanding, timelines, and support.
4. **Remain Positive.** Stress is part of leadership so don't let it poison your work mindset or, more importantly, your self-perception. Simply thinking positively will do a lot to ward off stress-producing negativity.
5. **Stay active.** As stress mounts it is important to engage in some physical activity that you enjoy: walk, swim, golf, stretch, or anything that will rev up blood flow. At times it seems almost impossible to "break away" for these kinds of activities, but it is an important way to control anger, depression, nervousness, and other manifestations of leadership stress.
6. **Organize your environment.** As simple as it sounds, it is helpful to take some time to organize your office. Clean up your desk, file, rearrange furniture, sort, etc. A little organization can give you a psychological boost.
7. **Talk out tough issues.** Find a trusted friend or colleague who you can talk to about the stress in your work life. You will find that most leaders experience the same types of stressors. Try not to dump too many stress related concerns at home. Keep work in perspective and keep it in its proper place.
8. **Be honest.** If someone is causing you disproportionate stress, talk to them; tell them how you are feeling. If you keep stressful things boxed inside, they may become toxic.
9. **Reflection.** When things are stressful, schedule time to reflect in solitude and quietness. This is a good way to find perspective and subsequently manage stress.
10. **Take Breaks.** Don't put yourself on overload—force yourself to take scheduled breaks: go for lunch, visit a colleague, take a short walk, have a cup of coffee away from your desk, listen to a favorite piece of music, etc.
11. **Control your contact time.** Don't allow someone to barge in on your work day unannounced. Tell them you don't have time right now but that you would be happy to schedule them in at a later time. This is true also for the telephone and e-mail. You don't have to drop everything to answer the phone or respond to an e-mail alert.
12. **Work for clarity.** On a regular basis write down your leadership goals. As stress builds, it is easy to lose track of what you really want to accomplish at work. Clarity of purpose is a solid defense against leadership stress.