



## Part Two

# Personality and Stress

### 3. Personality Plays a Part

### 4. Wisdom of the Ages

### 5. Characteristics of a Hardy Personality

It is not the delicate, neurotic person who is prone to angina, but the robust, the vigorous in mind and body, the keen and ambitious man, whose engine is always at “full speed ahead,” the well set man of from forty-five to fifty-five years of age, with military bearing, iron gray hair, and florid complexion.—William Osler

#### **In Part Two you will learn:**

- the ways that living habits, personality traits, and behavior patterns can make you susceptible to stress;
- coping techniques or wisdom of the ages for dealing with stress;
- the characteristics of a hardy personality.

#### **What is the “take away” point?**

Use wisdom of the ages and the characteristics of a hardy personality for managing stress.



## Chapter Three Personality Plays a Part

### The stress-prone person

Harvard University Professor Douglas Powell tells a story about two sons of an alcoholic. One becomes a drunk, the other a teetotaler. When asked to explain themselves, each gave the same answer: “With a father like that, what can you expect?” The moral of the story is that it is not the problems we have in our lives, but how we manage them that makes the difference.<sup>1</sup>

An important factor in the stress equation is the role of personality. Some people are able to handle tremendous amounts of pressure, conflict, and frustration and reduce this down to size, while others actually create stress and suffer negative consequences.<sup>2</sup>

In the nineteenth century, William Osler wrote, “I believe that the high pressure at which men live, and the habit of working the machine to its maximum capacity, are responsible for arterial degeneration.” He described one of his patients as follows:

Living an intense life, absorbed in his work, devoted to his pleasures, passionately devoted to his home, the nervous energy of the patient is taxed to the uttermost, and his system is subjected to that stress and strain which seems to be a basic factor in so many cases of angina pectoris.<sup>3</sup>

This general description is an old version of the modern concept of the stress-prone person. Note that it makes direct connections between mind and body, and between lifestyle and health.

As early as the seventeenth century, physician William Harvey (1578–1657) described the relationship between mind and body when he wrote:

Every affection of the mind that is attended with either pain or pleasure, hope or fear, is the cause of an agitation whose influence extends to the heart.<sup>4</sup>

Research over the past forty years has extended our understanding of stress and health. One of the outcomes of this research has been to demonstrate scientifically that living habits, personality traits, and behavioral patterns can influence the body. Another has been to show that stress does not generally occur in isolation and is often tied to social relationships. Part Two of this book examines the difference between the stress-prone and the stress-resistant personalities and provides effective coping techniques or wisdom of the ages for managing stress.

### Behavior patterns

People react differently to stress. One person may fly into a rage after being cut off by a motorist, while another simply shrugs it off. Consequently, a key issue about stress is not how much

of it there is, but how well it is handled. Are you the type of person who takes a small amount of stress and makes it into a mountain? Or are you the type who can handle many little hassles and major life changes while keeping things in perspective?

Research shows that personality plays an important part in determining a person's susceptibility to stress and stress-related problems. Some people are "hardgoing" and live their lives in ways that increase physical and emotional wear and tear. Others are easygoing in their approach to life and its problems. Whether a person is a "turtle" or a "racehorse" by temperament, certain personality traits and living habits, formed largely through the influence of culture, correlate positively and significantly with heart disease. That these traits and habits can and should be modified is the central point of *Type A Behavior and Your Heart* by Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman.

Friedman and Rosenman, two cardiologists in private practice in San Francisco during the 1950s, became interested in the connection between personality types and heart disease almost by accident. Needing the chairs in their waiting room reupholstered, they scheduled the work to be done. As the upholsterer departed, he asked the doctors what line of work they were in. They answered that they were heart specialists. He said, "I was just wondering, because it is so strange that only the front edges of your chair seats are worn out"—patients had been sitting on the edges of their chairs.

The doctors were initially puzzled by this, but after reflecting on the many diagnostic sessions they had conducted with their patients and their patients' families, they thought they understood the reason. Time after time, they could remember having a conversation something like this: "Doctor, I know your tests tell you this, and your instruments tell you that, but if you want to know my Jim's problem, it is . . ." In almost every case, the family would go on to describe an almost identical constellation of behaviors and personality characteristics that they believed had caused the heart disease.<sup>5</sup>

Basing their conclusions on the Western Collaborative Group Study, an epidemiological project completed in 1964, Friedman and Rosenman label highstress behaviors as type A and their opposites as type B. Included in the list of type A, coronary-prone, behaviors are the following:<sup>6</sup>

- **An intense drive to advance oneself or one's causes and to "beat the competition."** Whatever the occupation, trade, or profession, the type A's mental set is to be "number one." The goal may be related to work, family, or personal life, but in any case, the type A person is intensely driven to succeed.
- **An adversarial and competitive manner in interpersonal relationships.** Opinionated and often rigid, the type A person seemingly likes to argue, talks "at" others instead of "with" them, and is subject to vocal outbursts. The type A is easily irritated and seems to be in a constant struggle with other people and events.
- **Continuous involvement in a variety of activities at several levels of demand.** The type A person has a history of simultaneous work on big-picture, middle-picture, and little-picture matters, with little or no rest in between. The type A is like an octopus, wishing to have ten arms in order to get more things accomplished. As a rule, the type A person avoids repetitive chores and routine work.

- **A quick pace in walking, eating, speaking, and gesturing.** The type A person has a habitual sense of time urgency. Such a person moves through the day at an intense pace. It might be said that type A people have the “hurryup disease.” They seem to be in mortal conflict with Father Time, constantly working against impossible deadlines and time constraints.
- **Physical and mental alertness.** The type A person is characteristically tense and poised for action. Although extreme alertness may be necessary at times, constant excitement of the body—a high level of hormonal and chemical activity—without constructive physical release can be self-destructive.
- **Impatience in interpersonal relations.** The type A can be extremely demanding in human relationships (especially with people they care about). Expecting perfection from others, who rarely match up, a type A becomes critical and is prone to argument. This person often shouts and has even been known to throw things. Although this colorful personality may attract others and people may care for him or her, the type A’s intolerance for the imperfections of others often harms these relationships.
- **Inability to relax.** The type A is subject to a condition known as “Sunday neurosis,” an inability to relax without feeling guilty. When a type A person finds him- or herself with a day of rest, the person quickly becomes restless, feeling that he or she is wasting time. A type A person has a strong need to be doing something useful and does not equate free time and relaxation with being useful.
- **Dislike for waiting.** The type A hates waiting in lines. If he or she has to wait in a line, such as at the store, bank, or theater, the type A becomes irritated. If forced to wait in a traffic jam, a type A will typically experience increased blood pressure as he or she dwells on the lost time and productivity caused by the delay. It is common to see type A people honking the horn, leaning out of the window, making hand gestures, and talking to themselves.

This behavior contrasts with that of type B people, who consider that if they want to get to their destinations, they must wait; there is no alternative. They cannot get out of their cars and throw the others out of the way, so they avoid thinking about the delay. Instead, the type B uses forced waiting time to do something constructive, which might even involve relaxation.

In summary, type A people tend to be success oriented, driven by internal forces to accomplish more and more in less and less time. When this urge is out of control, they become perpetually active until exhaustion occurs. Often, type A’s have poor human relationships because they seem to have little or no time or patience for people, or their aggressive behavior upsets others. Also, type A’s may have trouble winding down from the intense state at which they operate; muscle tension, aches and pains, and insomnia are common. Finally, type A’s rarely pause to enjoy the moment, as they are typically in a hurry; their mental focus is usually on the next task, the next mountain to climb.

The primary significance of Friedman and Rosenman's work was their finding that type B personalities experience less stress and have a lower incidence of cardiovascular disease, while type A's experience greater stress and have a higher incidence of heart disease. Further, they discovered that heart disease in type A people is often exhibited early in life, sometimes when they are in their thirties and forties. Friedman and Rosenman maintain that coronary heart disease almost never occurs before seventy years of age in type B people, even if they smoke, eat fatty foods, and don't exercise.<sup>7</sup>

There is a common belief that heart disease is a *man's* illness, partly because research efforts have focused on men who have had heart attacks in their prime midlife earning years. The fact is, women tend to get heart disease later than men, but it is usually more severe. According to the American Heart Association, as of 1995 one in eight American women age 45 and older have had a heart attack or stroke. Also a woman's risk of dying from heart disease is one in two in contrast to 1 in 9 of having breast cancer. Heart disease remains the leading killer of women in the United States. In 2007, studies showed that American women are six times more likely to die from heart disease than from breast cancer. Heart disease is no longer primarily a "man's disease."<sup>8</sup>

Although a causal relationship has not been established between personality type, stress levels, and heart disease (only a high correlation has been documented), since 1980 the National Institutes of Health have recognized type A behavior as a risk factor in coronary heart disease. It is estimated that 75 percent of men have type A personality traits and that almost twice as many men fit the type A profile as women.<sup>9</sup>

People should be aware of whether they have a type A or type B personality. Consider that at present, heart disease is the number one cause of death in the United States. Forty-five percent of heart attacks and 20 percent of cardiac deaths occur before the age of 65. At least 250,000 people a year die within the first hour of attack and before they reach the hospital. A large percentage of these deaths occur between the ages of 35 and 50 and are classified as "premature" deaths. These statistics alone should encourage you to do everything you can to reduce your chances of being one of the stricken.<sup>10</sup>

The following is a questionnaire to help you determine your personality type.

2  
0  
9  
0  
T  
S

## Application: the Stress Barometer – Type A, Type B Behavior Test

What am I like? The following is a list of personality traits and behavior patterns. After each trait, check the answer that best describes you. Sometimes you will feel that you belong somewhere between the columns. This is to be expected.

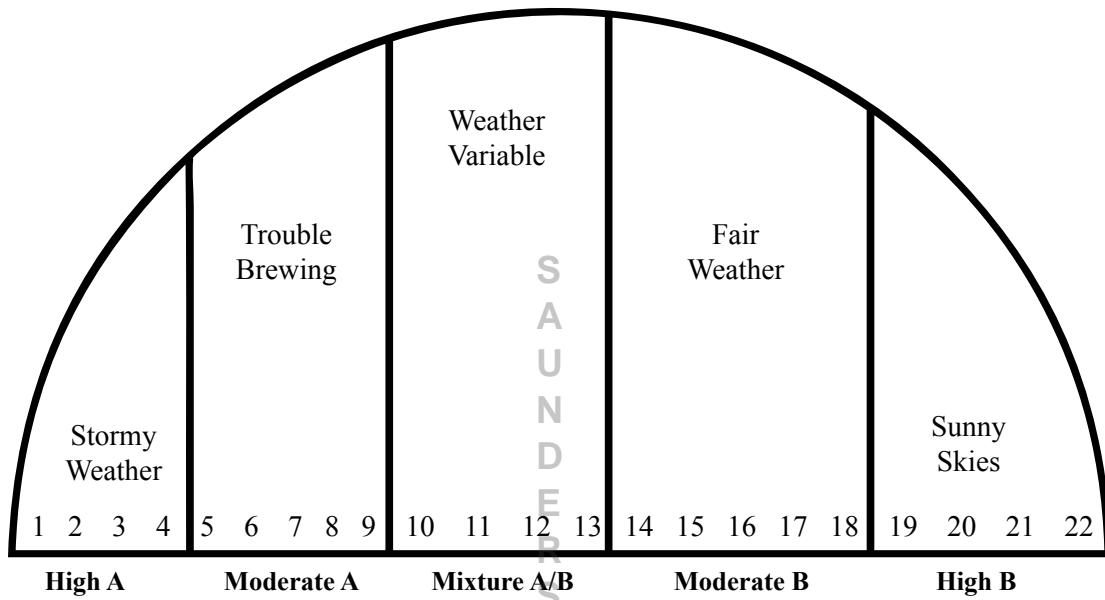
	Column A Often	Column B Rarely
I become impatient when events move slowly.		
I work overtime or bring work home.		
I feel guilty when I relax and do nothing.		
I find myself talking “at” people instead of “with” people.		
I speak, eat, or move at a quick pace.		
I can’t stand waiting in lines.		
I do things to extremes.		
I have a strong need for perfection.		
I become angry easily.		
I have disagreements with others.		
I try to think about or do two or more things at once.		
I am number oriented (I like to count my accomplishments and possessions).		
I overschedule myself.		
I take little notice of my physical surroundings.		
People fail to meet my standards.		
I become impatient with people.		
I hurry the ends of sentences, or do not speak them at all.		
I feel driven to accomplish my goals.		
I am tense.		
I am subject to vocal outbursts.		
I am occupied primarily by my own interests and actions.		
I am quick to challenge opposing views.		

Source: Based on Meyer Friedman and Ray H. Rosenman, *Type A Behavior and Your Heart* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), 80-88; and Meyer Friedman and Diane Ulmer, *Treating Type A Behavior and Your Heart* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984).

### Scoring and interpretation

Give yourself one point for each check mark in column B in the Stress Barometer test, and circle the total on the chart in Figure 3.1. Your score is a measure of whether you are a type A or type B person and indicates your corresponding susceptibility to stress and stress-related illness.

**Figure 3.1 The Stress Barometer**



Scores	Personality Type	Stress Forecast
1 through 4	High A	Stormy Weather
5 through 9	Moderate A	Trouble Brewing
10 through 13	Mixture A/B	Weather Variable
14 through 18	Moderate B	Fair Weather
19 through 22	High B	Sunny Skies

**Discussion**

There are five major points to remember about the Stress Barometer test:

- The purpose of the test is to increase your awareness of the relationship between behavior patterns and health. Scores reveal levels of susceptibility for groups of people, and these may or may not be accurate for you as an individual because (1) there is no certainty that all type A personalities (scores 1 through 9) will have heart disease and (2) there is no assurance that all type B personalities (scores 14 through 22), will not have heart disease. What is generally assured for type B's is that if you do have heart disease, your personality will not be on the list of contributing factors.
- There are three basic elements of the type A personality: (1) speed/impulse, (2) competitiveness, and (3) anger/hostility.<sup>11</sup> Of these, anger/hostility is usually the most serious problem. Acceptable outlets are often found for speed/impulse and competitiveness in the areas of hobbies, sports, and business. Anger and hostility are not as personally or socially acceptable. Thus, their effects are often experienced internally, resulting in harmful physical wear and tear.<sup>12</sup>

An early link between hostility and heart disease is suggested by the story of eighteenth century English medical professor Sir John Harvey when he said, “My life is in the hands of any fool who chooses to annoy me.” He apparently recognized the link between his anginal chest pain and his arguments with colleagues. One evening in 1793, his prediction came true. After a heated dispute at a hospital board meeting, Dr. Harvey stormed out, collapsed, and died.<sup>13</sup>

To show that the connection between anger and health has been noted in other cultures as well, consider the following Chinese proverb:

The fire you kindle for your enemy often burns you more than him.<sup>14</sup>

Hostility comes from the Latin word *hostis*, which means enemy. The hostile person sees enemies everywhere: on the job, in the store, on the road, and in society at large. Because of the health damaging effects of hostility, the hostile person becomes his own worst enemy. The hostile person becomes easily angered at relatively minor irritations and is preoccupied with the errors and inadequacies of others. Hostility rarely stands alone. It is typically intertwined with suspiciousness and self-centeredness.<sup>15</sup>

Redford Williams of Duke University, author of *The Trusting Heart* and *Anger Kills*, states that anger/hostility is the most harmful component of the type A personality. He identifies the “toxic core” of the coronary prone personality: cynical mistrust of other people’s motives, frequent feelings of anger, and expression of hostility towards others without regard for their feelings. His prescription for reducing anger is to put yourself in the other person’s shoes, learn to laugh at yourself, relax, practice trust, listen, act as if this day is your last, and practice forgiveness.<sup>16</sup>

- The toxic effects of chronic anger are well documented.

If you become angered by some stimulation, your hypothalamus will almost instantly send signals to your sympathetic nervous system (that portion of the nervous system not directly under conscious control), causing the secretion of large amounts of epinephrine and norepinephrine (otherwise known as adrenaline and noradrenalin, or as a group, as catecholamines). In addition, this same anger will also induce the hypothalamus to send messages to the pituitary gland, the master of all endocrine glands, urging it to discharge some of its own exclusively manufactured hormones and also to send out chemical signals to the adrenal, sex, and thyroid glands and the pancreas as well, so that they in turn may secrete extra amounts of their exclusively manufactured hormones. As a consequence, not only will your tissues be bathed by an excess of catecholamines when you become angry, they may also be exposed to exceedingly large amounts of various pituitary and adrenal hormones, testosterone (or estrogen), thyroxine, and insulin. If your struggles become *chronic*, then a *chronic* excess discharge of these various hormones also occurs.<sup>17</sup>

- Type A and type B behaviors are determined largely by culture. Compare America with Polynesia, or compare two groups of people with the same roots—Germany and Austria. Note the contrast between America and Germany (type A) and Polynesia and Austria with their relaxed and congenial ways (type B). In any society, certain behavior patterns are rewarded and thus reinforced. This socialization process includes role



modeling, identification, and habituation.

- At the family level, consider how subtle but basic actions of parents can influence children:

Type A parents who are engaged in a chronic struggle against time and other persons may teach their children a sense of time urgency and interpersonal aggressiveness. Children are most likely to take on these behavior patterns if they value the consequences they see their parents derive from that behavior. Examples of perceived benefits include recognition, wealth, and prestige.<sup>18</sup>

You may be thinking, “It seems like advancements in business, engineering, transportation, etc., are achieved by type A societies and individuals, and these accomplishments are to be valued.” It is true that in a world of competition and struggle, type A behavior may help you get to the top; however, four important points should be noted:

1. Although type A behavior may help you get to the top, it could be damaging your health, and you may not live to enjoy the results of your efforts unless you become more B-like somewhere along the way. The obituaries of every town newspaper tell the story of young and talented people who die because of type A behavior. Their gifts remain—but they are gone. Often, they are only sixty, fifty, forty, or even thirty years of age.

The high stress of type A behavior increases chances of heart attack through a perpetually high heart rate, hypertension, damage to coronary artery walls, and excessive cholesterol flow in the blood. These physical processes occur in subtle, silent ways. Heart attack victims have little advance warning, although pain in or tightening of the chest is a warning in many cases. If you also smoke, do not exercise, are overweight, have a history of heart disease in your family, and eat too many high-cholesterol foods, your chances of heart attack are further increased.<sup>19</sup>

2. People, more than any other beings, create their world. Thus, there can be peace instead of war and concern for others versus self-centeredness if people have sufficient will to attain these. People can create societies, organizations, and families supportive of type B behavior. Imagine a family that teaches love over hate, or a company that encourages employee cooperation over internal conflict. One can retain desirable parts of the type A behavior pattern (such as increased productivity) and change the harmful part (anger/hostility).
3. Recent studies show that as many type B as type A individuals actually obtain high levels of accomplishment. This may be due to the fact that positive A qualities, such as ambition and persistent hard work, are offset by negative A behaviors, such as impatience in decision making and argumentativeness in human relations. Indeed, there is evidence that type A's are not as good at performing some executive functions—examining alternatives, setting priorities, and enlisting the aid of coworkers and subordinates—as are their type B counterparts.<sup>20</sup>
4. An individual or society can be B-like without being lazy or unproductive. It is possible to achieve great feats by working efficiently and to enjoy these accomplishments by living intelligently. It is possible to be successful and live to enjoy it.

## More about anger

Research points to the harmful effects of anger in terms of health consequences. People who are hostile have poorer health, in general, including higher rates of hypertension, coronary heart disease, and even death. Harvard Medical School researchers have found that the most common emotion experienced in the two hours before a heart attack is anger. In a very real sense, anger is just one letter away from danger.<sup>21</sup>

One study of 255 physicians who had taken a standard personality test while attending University of North Carolina's medical school showed that over the next 25 years, those individuals whose anger/hostility scores had been in the top half were four to five times more likely to develop heart disease than those whose scores were in the lower half. A similar study of 118 lawyers found equally striking results. Of those individuals who scored in the top quarter for anger/hostility, nearly one in five was dead by age 50. Of those in the lowest quarter, only one in twenty-five died by age 50.<sup>22</sup>

Too often, people overreact to the minor agitations of everyday life. Feelings of anger run a range from low-level aggravation to high-level rage. Expressions of anger range from low-level arguments to high-level verbal and physical assault. The more prevalent and intense these are in a person's general pattern of behavior or approach to life, the more serious the health consequences. With heart pounding, blood pressure skyrocketing, and adrenaline surging, we are causing harm to ourselves by pushing our bodies beyond their limits.

Do men and women differ when it comes to anger? Research shows that in U.S. society incidents of anger (six to seven times a week), intensity of anger (aggravation to fury), and causes of anger (traffic jams, inconsiderate people, and waiting in lines) are generally the same for both sexes. What is different is styles of anger: Men's anger is typically straightforward and uncomplicated by restraint or guilt. Women are more likely to feel self-conscious and embarrassed, equating anger with inappropriate loss of control. After an outburst, women tell themselves, "Whoa! Get a grip." Men say, "That ought to teach them!" Either approach to anger—blowing your stack in public, which men tend to do, or seething silently in private, which women tend to do—can put your heart at risk.<sup>23</sup>

The banishment of anger is not possible anymore than the banishment of hunger. And who would want to? Anger can play a positive role in combating injustice and rectifying wrongs. The real problem is constant and free-floating anger, especially when it is acted out verbally or physically. An occasional flash of temper is not the problem, but a permanent state of aggravation and conflict is.

In dealing with anger, the best advice is to relax, take a deep breath, count to ten, walk around the block, and decide whether an issue is worth a war. Accept with grace the trivial errors of others and the small irritations of life. Resist getting worked up by lowering your voice, unclenching your fists and jaw, relaxing your muscles, and letting tension and anger seep away. This is not to say you should repress your feelings or deny that you are angry. Instead, simply decide, is this a hill worth dying on? If not, you should loosen up and let it go.<sup>24</sup>

## The hot reactor syndrome

Friedman and Rosenman's work on personality and stress triggered an avalanche of interest and study on the stress-prone person. One of the best yields has been the work of cardiologist

Robert Eliot and his associates at the National Center of Preventive and Stress Medicine in Phoenix, Arizona, and the Institute of Stress Medicine in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Eliot relates a personal account that is fascinating and instructive of how the *hot reactor syndrome* can develop and have terrible consequences.

### **Keeping things in perspective**

Wise men speak of the moment of clarity—that instant when absolute knowledge presents itself. My moment of clarity came as I was doubled up in a bathroom at a Nebraska community hospital two hundred miles from home. Earlier that morning, after conducting grand rounds in the facility's coronary care unit, I had participated in a cardiology conference before my peers. My lecture had been on heart attacks and sudden death. I had experienced some discomfort during the program but dismissed it as indigestion—or, at worst, a bout with my gallbladder.

It had been a hectic week. The day before the conference, back at my own hospital, I had argued both vehemently and unsuccessfully with administrators over the budget, manpower, and timing regarding a planned cardiovascular center. Two days before that I had flown back from an exhausting lecture series in New Orleans—where, once again, I had been the so-called expert on sudden cardiac death.

In that bathroom, the first symptom I noticed was intense pressure. It began near my breastbone; shot up into my shoulders, neck, and jaws; and surged down again through both of my arms. It was as if an elephant had plopped down on my chest. I could barely catch my breath. I started sweating. I began getting bowel cramps and then overwhelming nausea. Immediately I diagnosed my own condition: myocardial infarction. Later, as the nurses helped me into a hospital bed, I remember saying with astonishment, “I’m having a heart attack.” I was forty-four years old.

During my recovery I realized my professional life had become a joyless treadmill. I had worked tirelessly for acceptance within the medical community and yet efforts to establish my own cardiovascular center had failed. This was a bitter pill for someone who had always defined life in terms of victory or defeat. My disillusionment was compounded by the knowledge that I had brought promising associates into this seemingly futile situation. I’ve since described my state of mind as *invisible entrapment*.

I didn’t like being on the wrong side of the sheets in a coronary care unit. Something had to change; and I asked myself, “Is any of this worth dying for?” Fortunately for me, my answer was “No!” I had looked into the abyss and decided to stop sweating the small stuff. Pretty soon, I saw that it was *all* small stuff.<sup>25</sup>

While Friedman and Rosenman observed psychological traits and patterns of behavior, Eliot and his colleagues emphasize physiological effects. They have found that hot reactors can belong to any camp—A or B, male or female. The determining factor is the body’s response to stress.

So what exactly is the “hot reactor syndrome,” and how do stress practitioners test for its presence? People tend to respond to stress in one of two ways. “Cold” reactors may seem upset when confronted with a stressful situation but experience few physiological changes. In contrast, “hot” reactors to stress experience a flood of the powerful chemicals associated with the classic GAS stress response, whether or not this is visible to others.

Hot reactors are those individuals who exhibit extreme cardiovascular arousal when they are under stress. One of the most dangerous aspects of hot reacting is a dramatic rise in blood pressure as often as thirty or forty times a day. As a result, blood pressure is higher for a longer time, resulting in greater risk of developing chronic high blood pressure and heart disease. The more aroused people get physiologically, the more likely they are to suffer from cardiovascular problems. In fact, excess stress chemicals released during states of alarm and vigilance can literally rupture heart muscle fibers. This creates short circuits and malfunctioning heart rhythm. When this happens, death can result.<sup>26</sup>

### **How the hot reactor stress test works**

The Cardiac Performance Lab (CPL) developed by Eliot and his colleagues consists of three stages: the mental arithmetic challenge, the competitive video game, and the cold pressor test.

During the mental arithmetic challenge, the individual is placed in an isolated environment, seated in a comfortable but alert position, and attached to recording electrodes. A televised, nonthreatening guide instructs the subject to “Subtract sevens serially from 777, going as fast as possible. That is, 777, 770, 763, and so on. Keep going. You have three minutes. Don’t make any mistakes.”

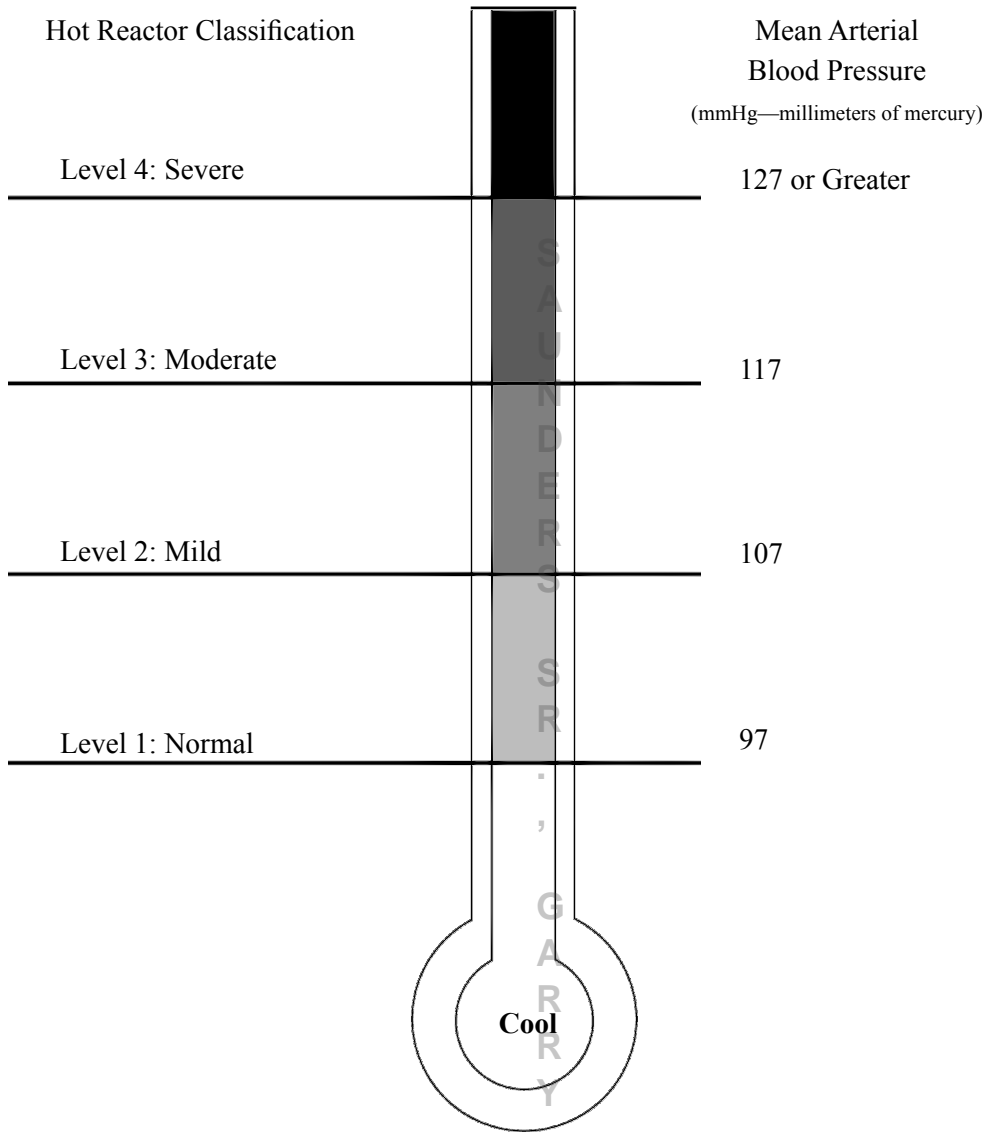
In the same isolated environment, the individual is challenged to improve performance at a competitive video game. As the subject’s skill improves, the game becomes more difficult and thus more stressful. In potential hot reactors it is an excellent tool for raising blood pressure to its highest level.

The final stage consists of the cold pressor test. It is a classic test of the body’s physiological responses to a physical stress—in this case, extreme cold. In fact, studies show this test to be the best single predictor of cardiovascular catastrophes. The subject is asked to immerse his or her hand in a bucket of ice water and to try to hold this position for sixty seconds. The higher the blood pressure rises, the more likely the person is to have a premature cardiovascular catastrophe.

If the subject’s mean blood pressure rises inappropriately and/or abruptly (above 107 mmHg—millimeters of mercury) during any of the three tests, then he or she is considered to be a hot reactor. This is true even if the *resting blood pressure* is normal. Such a person is at increased risk for the myriad of stress-related health problems.<sup>27</sup> See Figure 3.2.

The World Health Organization’s criterion for high blood pressure is 140/90, which gives a mean blood pressure of 107 mmHg. This level or below indicates a physiologically safe range. Above this level, see your physician for a program of blood pressure regulation. Low blood pressure is generally an indicator of good cardiovascular health. The exception is when low blood pressure occurs with other symptoms such as lightheadedness or fainting when standing.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 3.2 What is a Hot Reactor?**<sup>29</sup>



$$\text{Mean Blood Pressure} = \frac{\text{Systolic Blood Pressure} - \text{Diastolic Blood Pressure}}{3} + \text{Diastolic Blood Pressure}$$

For example, if blood pressure is 120/80, then the mean blood pressure is:

$$\frac{120 - 80}{3} + 80,$$

or 93 mmHg.

## Chapter Three References

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## Chapter Four Wisdom of the Ages

### Stress coping techniques

What can be done to deal with stress? There are two basic strategies: reduce stress by changing your environment or manage stress through effective coping techniques.

Whether you are a businessperson, homemaker, parent, or student, certain principles can help you cope with the inevitable stresses of life. These apply to racehorses, turtles, and all temperaments in between. The following are sixteen principles for being a “B” as well as avoiding the hot reactor syndrome. These are coping techniques for managing stress that are timeless and apply to all types of people. In this sense, they represent Wisdom of the Ages.<sup>1</sup>

### One—follow the principle of moderation

Stress not only is inevitable, it is desirable. Creative tension usually accompanies great achievement, and the desire to succeed is necessary to overcome many of life’s problems. The goal is not to reduce all stress, but to experience stimulation in your life that is satisfying without being destructive.

The following story shows the value of avoiding extremes:

In “How Much Land Does a Man Require,” Leo Tolstoy wrote about Pakhom, a greedy man who was offered, by the Starshima of the Bashkirs, all the land he could cover by foot in a single day, from sunrise to sunset.

Lured by the fantastic offer, Pakhom set out at the crack of dawn and walked on hour after hour. It seemed as though the farther he went, the better the land became. At midday, he looked up and saw the sun overhead. It was a sign that he should turn back and head for the starting point. But then he thought of how much more land he could acquire, and the thought compelled him to keep on going.

Hour after hour passed. Now, surely, Pakhom would have to turn around and go back if he were to reach the starting point before sunset. Finally, he turned toward the starting point. But before long, he realized he had waited too long. He had been too greedy.

His heart pounded fiercely as he began to run. Soon, his breath grew shorter and shorter. Still he forced himself to run faster and faster, even though his legs were numb.

At last, Pakhom could see the Starshima and a small group of Bashkirs at the starting point awaiting his return. With his last ounce of strength, he reached the group, fell to the ground in complete exhaustion, and died.

The people buried him, saying, “This is how much land a man requires.”<sup>2</sup>



Besides avoiding excesses such as Pakhom's, you should strive for balance in your life. You should seek balance between rest and work and thus avoid either sinking into laziness or becoming a workaholic. You should recognize that you are both a public and a private person and thus enjoy others but take pleasure in solitude as well. Daily, you should do something for each dimension of your being— spirit, mind, and body.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle prescribed, "Moderation, moderation, all things in moderation." This is a good rule to live by regarding both excesses and balance. To the romantic, this may sound unattractive. But the fact is, if your goal in life is to experience the greatest satisfaction over the longest duration, you must avoid extremes, live a balanced life, and strive for *stress without distress*.

Moderation is especially important when you are sick. Sometimes, no matter what steps you take, the flu or a cold temporarily defeats your immune system's defenses. Slow down. You can't expect your body to cope with a high activity level and combat disease simultaneously. You will get well faster if you give your body a needed break and rest.

### **Slow Down**

While I was a junior in college, I found myself going to school full time, working four part-time jobs (including twenty-five hours second shift at a local hospital), maintaining my own apartment, and doing a physical workout each day. I started to notice that my hair was falling out (I was 21, so this was very disturbing), and I felt fatigued all the time. One day in a biology class I learned that my blood pressure was high. I didn't believe this was possible—surely the instrument must be wrong. A visit to my doctor and a complete physical resulted in orders: "You've got to slow down and start taking better care of yourself or you'll never live to enjoy the fruits of your labors." My doctor scared me enough to change my lifestyle. I quit all but one job and learned to make do with less material things. I started eating better, meditating, and leading a more healthful lifestyle. Slowing down taught me the mathematics of nature—addition by subtraction. —Author's file notes (S. M.)

### **Two—set priorities**

People can handle enormous amounts of stress as long as they feel in control. It is only when events seem to be spinning out of control that accelerated wear and tear occurs. Have you ever felt out of control? Have you ever felt that you had too much to do and too little time? Setting priorities can help solve this problem.

You should be aware of the 80/20 rule when setting priorities: 80 percent of the value of something usually comes from 20 percent of its elements. For example, salespeople typically receive 80 percent of their business from 20 percent of their customers. Similarly, supervisors usually obtain 80 percent of their productivity from 20 percent of their workers (and 80 percent of their problems from another 20 percent). Finally, in the typical family, 80 percent of the stress is caused by 20 percent of the members.<sup>3</sup>

Knowing and following the 80/20 rule is an effective stress-coping technique. Realizing that 80 percent of what you value usually comes from 20 percent of what you do, you should prioritize your activities and work on the top 20 percent first. You should write these down and check

them off as you complete them. Doing this will help you feel in control of situations, increase satisfaction, provide a feeling of progress, and alleviate unnecessary stress.

When setting priorities, you should consider your personal values and goals in life. Ask yourself, “What is important?”—family, work, education, and so on—and then prioritize your activities accordingly. Otherwise, you will become frustrated and feel unfulfilled, always working on matters that are relatively unimportant to you.

Look at the way your energy is used, and note especially if it is being drained away on unimportant matters. Say *yes* to high-priority items that support your values—family, health, work, and so on—and *no* to low priorities. By saying no to low value activities, you can embrace high value activities more fully. Simplify your life by putting first things first and doing one task at a time. In this way you will avoid clutter and confusion.

Meetings can be a major source of stress in the workplace. Although meetings are essential, they can also be a waste of valuable time and resources. To ensure that your meetings are in line with your priorities, consider a technique used during World War II to conserve gasoline. In each car, a sign was affixed: “Is this trip necessary?” You may want to begin to ask: “Is this meeting necessary? Does this meeting support my critical 20 percent?” If not, stay home and conserve resources.

### **Three—don’t try to be superhuman**

The famous boxer Muhammad Ali was on a plane trip from Chicago to Las Vegas when the stewardess asked everyone to fasten their seat belts. Of course, everyone did, except Muhammad Ali. When she leaned over to ask him to please buckle his seat belt, Ali said, “Superman don’t need no seat belt.” The stewardess thought and sweetly said, “Yes, and Superman don’t need no airplane either.”<sup>4</sup>

No one is immune to stress. Everyone experiences pressure, conflict, and frustration in the normal course of living. And no one is superhuman, so at some point everyone has a breaking point. We all have limitations of some sort—physical, emotional, and financial. To reduce unnecessary stress, decide what is important to you and put your time and effort into those activities. Tolerate some imperfections, and don’t try to be all things to all people. Avoid overpromising, overscheduling, and overcommitting.

To understand the “superperson syndrome,” look at the business and social calendar of the typical type A individual. There is probably more scheduled than can ever be accomplished. The type A person commonly tries to do more, ever more, until breakdown occurs. Breakdown may take the form of failure to meet commitments, or it may mean physical and emotional exhaustion. Living beyond your means can actually make you sick, as many have discovered who have tried to maintain a lifestyle they couldn’t afford financially, emotionally, or physically.

Learning when, how, and why to say *no* helps. When? Say *no* as soon as you realize that saying *yes* would be a mistake. Otherwise, others will be counting on you when they should not. How? Say *no* with compassion, because the other person’s request is important to that individual. Why? Because if you do not say no, something you have already promised to do will suffer, or you, yourself, will break down, bringing more harm to others than the consequences of the no response.

Saying *no* can be difficult. You may fear disapproval or rejection from others. Sometimes, too,

it may be hard to say *no* because you do not want to disappoint others. If you have a difficult time saying *no*, you might try saying, “I would like to say yes, but other things I have promised to do will suffer. We must wait until these obligations are finished.” This approach should not upset the other person. Reasonable people will understand, and friends will accept it.

The average person can handle a maximum of four major commitments at any one time and do them well. Imagine an individual with four responsibilities: (1) family; (2) work; (3) education; and (4) community service. Another major commitment, no matter how worthy, could be the “straw that breaks the camel’s back.”

One of the greatest sources of stress in life comes from unmet expectations. Sometimes expectations are not realistic, and the most practical and healthful answer is to revise expectations. We must accept the fact that every well has a bottom, and every person has limitations. Because we all have limits, we must make choices and concentrate our energies on doing high-priority activities well, while postponing or avoiding others. In this spirit, Salvador de Madariaga, the Spanish essayist, wrote:

Our eyes must be idealistic and our feet realistic. We must walk in the right direction, but we must walk step by step. Our tasks are to define what is desirable; to decide what is possible at any time within the scheme of what is desirable; to carry out what is possible in the spirit of what is desirable.<sup>5</sup>

While every individual needs some conception of the ideal, if our values and actions are not based in reality, they are likely to result in additional stress.

#### **Four-burner living**

Sometime between 1980 and 1988, I realized first-hand the meaning of the phrase “nobody is superman and everyone has limits.” I saw my life as a stovetop with four burners: Burner number 1 was family, number 2 was classes at the university, number 3 was consultations and studies, and number 4 was writing the books in the Human Side of Work series.

Then I thought, Where is the fifth burner? What if there is an emergency? That’s when I realized there was no fifth burner, and I could not afford an emergency of any kind. For the first time, I understood the wisdom, indeed the need, for having an escape clause.

I resolved at that time to avoid scheduling all four burners with major commitments that could not be reasonably reduced in an emergency. Operationally, this meant family first, university second, and consultations and books as important but nonessential activities. It is safe to say that *Stress: Living and Working in a Changing World* would not exist if it were not for the support of the university and a much appreciated sabbatical.— Author’s file notes (G. M.)

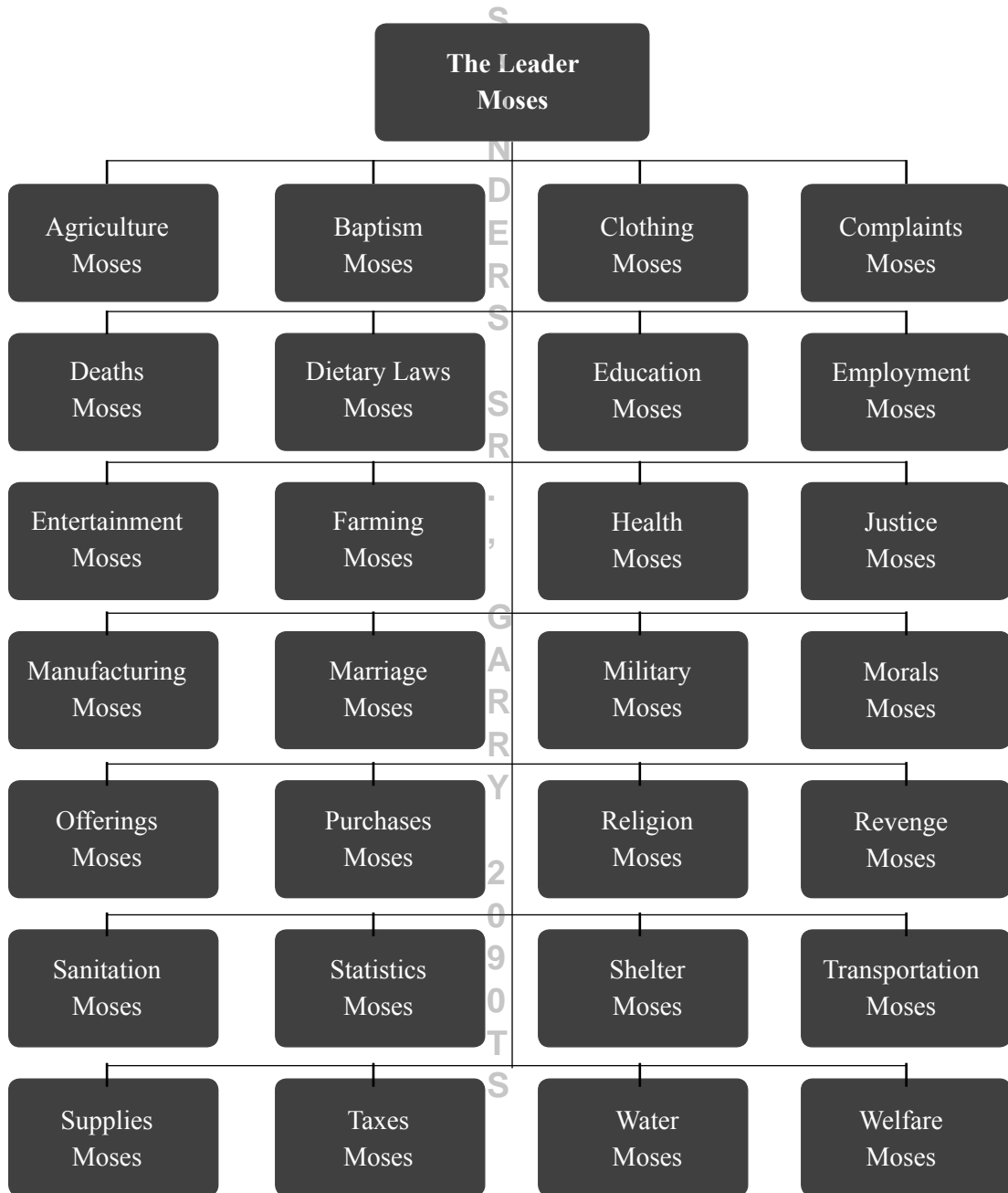
#### **Four—share the load**

An effective way to manage stress is to share the load; delegate tasks. When you are overloaded, gaining the help of others can result in three important benefits: (1) other people are developed; (2) overall performance increases; and (3) personal health improves. Figure 4.1 shows that delegation is not a new idea.

**Figure 4.1 The Need to Delegate**

**Lack of delegation**

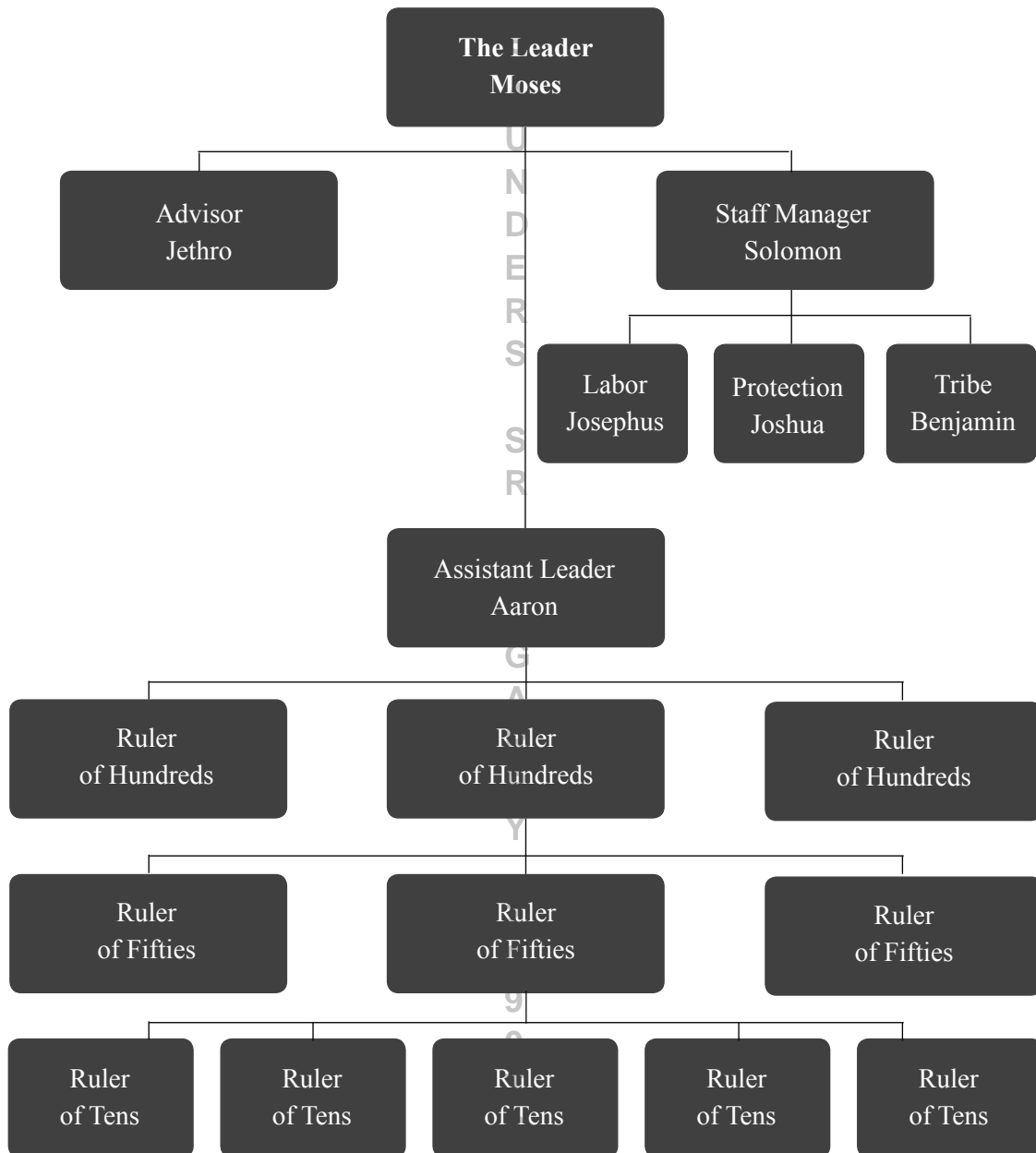
Perhaps the earliest recognition of the importance of delegation is found in the Bible. The Book of Exodus, Chapter 18, tells how “Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from the morning unto the evening.” Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, saw this and told him: “The thing thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee; for the one thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it alone.” At that time the Israeli organization chart was as follows:



**Delegation**

The subordinate rulers, Jethro advised, could judge “every small matter” and bring the great matters to Moses. Up to this point, the Israelites had spent 39 years on a journey that had taken them only about halfway to the Promised Land. After delegation took place, they completed the remaining half of the journey in less than a year. The new organization chart looked like this:

**Figure 4.1 (Continued)**



Source: Reprinted with permission from Ernst Dale, *Management: Theory and Practice, 3d ed.* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1973), 193-94.

## **Five—escape for a while**

Begin to think of yourself as a balanced person who can work hard and relax as well. You should avoid scheduling your life so that you are always in a hurry, rushing from place to place, never having time for a rest or pause. Of course, you should try to accomplish as much as you can in life, but leave room for needed breaks.

When things are going badly, it often helps to escape for a while—take a walk, read a book, work in the garden, take a nap, or go fishing. You don't have to hike the Himalayas or sail around the world. Changing your activity long enough to recover breath and balance is usually sufficient. The fact is that the average workday is not eight hours of uninterrupted labor. In order to combat fatigue and remain productive, people need breaks and will take them whether they are scheduled or not.<sup>6</sup>

Individuals, families, organizations, indeed whole nations, have the need to escape for a while. During World War II, immediately after the battle of Dunkirk, Great Britain was on the brink of collapse. If ever a country needed to produce, England did at that time. However, consider the following. Prior to Dunkirk, the average work week was 56 hours. After Dunkirk, the defeat and retreat of British and French forces by the Germans, the prime minister announced an increase to 69.5 hours for all workers in war-related industries. What actually resulted was a work week of barely 51 hours. The nation simply was fatigued and could produce no more; and had America not entered the war, relief might have been impossible and defeat probably would have resulted.<sup>7</sup>

The coffee break, the day of rest, and the annual vacation are pauses that refresh in the world of work. These breaks are useful antidotes to physical and emotional stress, and you must not feel guilty when you take one. It is interesting to note that for medium-heavy work, the optimum work week for volume produced (over extended periods of time) is 48 hours. After 48 hours, the average person is affected by fatigue and would be better served going home. Otherwise, mistakes are made, sickness occurs, and overall productivity declines.<sup>8</sup>

Even people who are famous for their strength and stamina need to escape for a while if they are going to be effective over the long haul. George Washington used to disappear for a time to nurse his nerves, momentarily suspending presidential chores. And consider the eloquence and humanness of another leader, Israeli prime minister Golda Meir, who after a particularly demanding and fatiguing time declared, "I have had enough."

It is interesting to note how cultures differ regarding vacations from work. In Europe five-week paid vacations and holidays are the norm, with employees required to take at least half of this time in one piece. They are told that this is to ensure that they come back with newly refreshed work spirits. Further, they are told that just a week away would not be enough time to unwind.<sup>9</sup>

One form of escaping for a while is a sojourn or sabbatical, during which time you review the past, evaluate the present, and plan for the future. This "midcourse correction" can be a positive force for self-renewal, which is the essence of responsibility and taking charge of your life. The second act you open and the second wind you gain can enhance and invigorate your life.

An often overlooked form of escaping for a while is the emotional release that tears can bring. Women have traditionally used this well, and with recent changes in society's attitudes, more

and more men are discovering the relief crying can bring when they are truly upset. Imagine the emotional release tears can provide for one who has lost a loved one or experienced some other tragedy.<sup>10</sup>

A mother with four children, including an infant and an active toddler, would often find herself overwhelmed by the end of the evening. After the children went to bed, she found solace by taking a shower and crying away the stress. With tears streaming down her face, she would pray for the strength to make it through another day. The water of the shower renewed her physically, mentally, and spiritually, so she could face another day of challenge.

### **Six—use a decompression chamber technique**

It is important to leave the pressures, conflicts, and frustrations of one arena of your life behind you when you enter another arena. In other words, leave home problems at home and work problems at work as much as possible. This is difficult to do unless you use a decompression chamber technique. The decompression chamber is the personal time and place you reserve to mentally unwind, physically relax, and spiritually renew yourself. Typically, the person in the decompression chamber applies the three R's—review past events, rehearse upcoming activities, and relax.

Most busy people can benefit from the decompression chamber technique as a coping mechanism. Examples include:

- the businessperson who uses the commute between work and home to forget one world and prepare for the next;
- the homemaker who sets aside personal time between daytime household chores and nighttime family activities.

### **Seven—talk with others**

When things bother you, talk them over with a level-headed person you can trust. This helps relieve tension, adds perspective, and helps you figure out what to do. The word “catharsis”—from the Greek *kathairein*, to purge—means “cleansing.” This is what happens in the talking-out process. People who are under stress report that they feel much better when they get things off their chest.<sup>11</sup>

To show that this is not a new observation, consider Shakespeare’s words in *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1594:

My tongue will tell the anger of my heart, or else my heart, concealing it, will break.

Talking it out is difficult for some people. Because of temperament or social conditioning, they are quiet and introverted, and talking about their problems can be uncomfortable. Other people are extroverted and find it easy to express their feelings and problems. But at times, everyone needs to talk over problems with someone. Otherwise, tension builds until the inevitable explosion occurs. Then everyone asks, “What in the world happened to Bill?” Typically, the more isolated you become, the more desperate your situation may seem.

Talking it out requires trust that the other person will not use what you say against you or be judgmental in a negative way. There is an old saying that you must be careful with whom you talk, because 70 percent of the people you may talk to don't care about your problems and 20 percent are glad that you have them. Only 10 percent truly care and want to help.

The people in your 10 percent may include your spouse, parents, or a close friend; or you may be included in someone else's 10 percent. In any case, whether you are the listener or the talker, you should remember that the good ideas, moods, and advice of others can have a comforting and constructive effect that can help you cope with stress.

People often turn to authority figures to talk over problems. Whether or not this person is helpful depends on his or her willingness to listen and personal integrity. A confidante must be worthy of another's trust and must never take advantage of another's problems and frailties.

Family and friends can be important allies against the negative effects of stress.<sup>12</sup> As the following shows, the family meeting can be an effective coping technique.

A relocated family uses a Sunday afternoon to discuss what is missing in everyone's lives. With phones and TV off, they talk together. It is a powerful experience for kids to see one parent on the verge of tears because she misses her old job, and for the other parent to say how frustrated he is with the management style of the new company, and for the kids to say how much they miss their old friends. Many families fail to grieve losses together. By grieving their losses, the family can become closer and can get unstuck and move forward with their lives.<sup>13</sup>

### **Eight—go easy with criticism**

There are two kinds of criticism—criticism of self and criticism of others; go easy with both. With regard to self-criticism, you may be too demanding, expecting perfection in all you do. Because you tend to find fault, you may have trouble feeling good about yourself and your accomplishments. For example, you may perform ten tasks; if eight turn out well and two do not, you may focus enormous attention on the two unsuccessful outcomes. This results in lowered self-esteem and even depression. In this way, self-criticism is a form of self-punishment.

One way to reduce self-criticism is to avoid the “must not” syndrome. This is the tendency to think in absolutes (I must not fail; I must not cry; I must not be afraid). By replacing must nots with should nots, you preserve high goals while experiencing less guilt and shame if you happen to fall short.

With regard to criticism of others, if you expect other people to be perfect you will feel disappointed, angry, and frustrated when they fail to measure up. You should remember that everyone, including yourself, has both good and bad characteristics; no one is perfect.

If you want to be honest in your relationships and enjoy others too, and if you would like to shape behavior as well, you should state your views and preferences honestly and openly—but don't concentrate on the negative. The following is a guide for healthy relations with others:



- State what you do and do not like. You may have to repeat what you do not like several times, because people are often poor listeners and hear only what they want to hear. However, be careful not to nag the other person.
- Recognize the strengths of other people. Tell them what you admire about them. This will reinforce their good qualities, as most people want to be recognized and appreciated for what they do.
- Ignore inappropriate behavior. If the behavior is not part of the person's basic "nature," it will go away (extinguish). If it is part of his or her makeup as a *person* (an essential element of personality), it is almost impossible to change. At this point, you have two choices—either ignore the behavior or avoid the person.<sup>14</sup>

Type B's recognize the importance of going easy on criticism and typically take a live-and-let-live attitude. Type A's often do not. They are closed to new ideas and ways of behaving and regularly go on campaigns to change other people's behavior. Usually, these are losing campaigns that lead to health problems, poor relationships, or both. Think about it; could someone change your behavior if you did not want to change?

### **Nine—worry less and do more**

The ninth principle is to manage your emotions as opposed to letting your emotions manage you. Some people are prone to worry. If they don't have something to worry about, they make up something to worry about. If you can solve a problem, do so; but don't worry about what you personally cannot change, no matter how important it may be. Starvation in underdeveloped countries, human rights in oppressive states, and the traffic jam you are in may be beyond your ability to solve as an individual right this minute. Nor should you worry about minor or unimportant matters. In the big picture, ask: How important is a ticking clock, a barking dog, or your mate's idiosyncrasies?

If something upsets you, do what you can to solve it, but avoid useless worry. This only makes a bad situation worse. Try following the advice of St. Francis of Assisi, later popularized by Reinhold Niebuhr in the following prayer: "Give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, courage to change what should be changed, and wisdom to distinguish one from the other."<sup>15</sup> Another saying, author unknown, makes the same point: "Of all the troubles mankind's got, some can be solved and some cannot. If there is a cure, find it; if not, never mind it."

Besides worry, two other emotions are particularly distressful. These are resentment over the past and anger in the present. A useful technique to help cope with the negative trilogy of resentment, anger, and worry is to accept three basic truths:

- You cannot change the past. (What is done is done, and being resentful is to no avail.)
- Not everyone is going to agree with you. (Being angry is a waste of precious time and energy. If you are angry, count to ten before you speak; if very angry, count to one hundred.)
- You are going to make mistakes. (Nobody bats a thousand; instead of worrying about this, use your faculties to keep your eye on the ball and concentrate on the swing.)

Like gravity, these facts are real, and the act of accepting them helps reduce nonproductive resentment, anger, and worry. The ninth principle can be summarized with the phrase “Lighten up!”<sup>16</sup>

### **Ten—enjoy the little things in life**

Research shows happiness springs primarily from feeling good over time, not from momentary peaks of ecstasy.<sup>17</sup> There are many small pleasures available to us. Consider how often you could enjoy your small child, read a good book, or take a walk with your mate. We tend to take for granted what we have until we lose it; then it’s too late.

The following story shows how it helps to focus on the positive and natural things in life, however small:

The historian Will Durant described how he looked for happiness in knowledge, and found only disillusionment. He then sought happiness in travel, and found weariness; in wealth, he found worry and discord. He looked for happiness in his own writing, and was only fatigued.

One day he saw a woman waiting in a tiny car with a sleeping child in her arms. A man descended from a train and came over and gently kissed the woman, and then the baby, very softly, so as not to waken him.

The family drove off and left Durant with a stunning realization of the true nature of happiness. He relaxed and discovered, “every normal function of life holds some delight.”<sup>18</sup>

When asked for advice, it is not unusual for those who have survived heart attacks or learned they have only a short time to live to say, “Take pleasure from the little things in life.”

Sometimes very small things right under our noses can give us pleasure. Gary Schwartz, professor of psychology at Yale University, uses the healing power of scent in the treatment of anxiety, hypertension, and other stress-related disorders. It is interesting to note that a spicy apple scent reminiscent of cider is highly effective for many people. It is also interesting to note how pleasant smells of childhood, such as pine logs, horses, and sea air evoke happy memories that help in stressful times.

One student found that the sweet aroma of honeysuckle on a fall morning relieved her anxiety of a new school year. Each morning before rising, she would focus on the smell of honeysuckle instead of the demands of school. Now, wherever she lives, she plants honeysuckle so she can reflect on the power of nature before starting each day.

Finding something that gives you pleasure may require a change in your environment. If so, take steps to make your work and living areas pleasant and satisfying. Surround yourself with people who give you happiness, and, every day, strive to do at least one activity that gives you peace of mind.<sup>19</sup>

Closely related to enjoying the little things in your life is to enjoy the pace of your life. Sometimes poetry is better than prose to make a point well. As you read from John McCollister’s poem, think about the pace of your own life at this point in time.

## SLOW DANCE

Have you listened to rain drops slapping on the ground,  
Followed a bird's beautiful flight,  
Or gazed at the sun into the fading night?  
You better slow down  
Don't dance so fast  
Time is short  
The music won't last

Do you run through each day on the fly?  
When you ask, "How are you?" do you hear the reply?  
When the day is done do you lie in your bed  
With the next hundred chores running through your head?  
You better slow down  
Don't dance so fast  
Time is short  
The music won't last

Have you ever told your child, "We'll do it tomorrow.?"  
And in your haste, not seen his sorrow?  
Have you ever lost touch, let friendship die  
Because you never had time to call and say "Hi.?"  
You better slow down  
Don't dance so fast  
Time is short  
The music won't last

When you run so fast to get somewhere  
You miss half the fun of getting there.  
When you worry and hurry through your day,  
It's like an unopened gift thrown away.  
Life is not a race. Do take it slower.  
Hear the music before the song is over.  
You better slow down  
Don't dance so fast  
Time is short  
The music won't last

### **Eleven—help another person**

Self-absorption can be dangerous to both mental and physical health. While thinking about yourself is normal and healthy to a degree, the trick is to not do it so much that you lose concern for the external world, especially the care and wellbeing of others. As an old saying goes, "Lose yourself to gain yourself." The antidote for self-absorption is to focus on the needs and problems of others.

Related to this idea is the concept of commitment. If you have people or principles in your life to which you are committed, you will feel motivated and will be able to withstand tremendous amounts of stress. Strong personal commitments are especially important during times of change. There are three things you can do to achieve strength of commitment:

- Decide who and what are really important to you.
- Take action that supports your values and goals.
- Take action that strengthens your relationships.<sup>20</sup>

### **Twelve—handle hassles healthfully**

When you feel hurried, harried, and hassled, stop and ask a few key questions that can help put things in perspective.

- What is the worst possible thing that can happen here?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with a life-ending catastrophe as a 10, where does this hassle rate?
- Who and what are important to you, and how, if at all, does this hassle affect them?
- A month from now, will you remember this hassle?

For many people, there are predictable times when hassles tend to be high, such as holidays, vacations, and other family get-togethers. To handle stress healthfully during these occasions, follow three basic rules:

- 1. Be realistic.** Set achievable goals. Don't expect every moment to be perfect and every person to be happy all of the time.
- 2. Keep things simple.** Invite the people and then trust the process. Relax and remember, less can be more. Follow the advice of Beatrix Potter — the shorter, the plainer, the better.
- 3. Share the tasks.** So often, one or two people shoulder most of the work. Instead, ask everyone to help in some meaningful way.

### **Thirteen—have a hobby**

Doing something you enjoy, and doing it regularly, is an ideal stress coping technique. Find an activity that is intrinsically satisfying. It will refresh your mind and body and even improve your relationships. Consider reading, traveling, church or civic involvement, cooking, sports, and music. Think back to what you used to do when you were young. What did you enjoy doing more than anything else?

For some people, there is no passion in life, something they want to do and enjoy immensely. For others, the problem is too many passions. The number and intensity of their interests seem boundless. The answer is to manage your passions—not too many, not too few. Of course, some behavior is harmful even in moderation. The criterion is, does an activity enrich and add to the overall quality of your life without causing harm to others?

### Fourteen—accentuate the positive

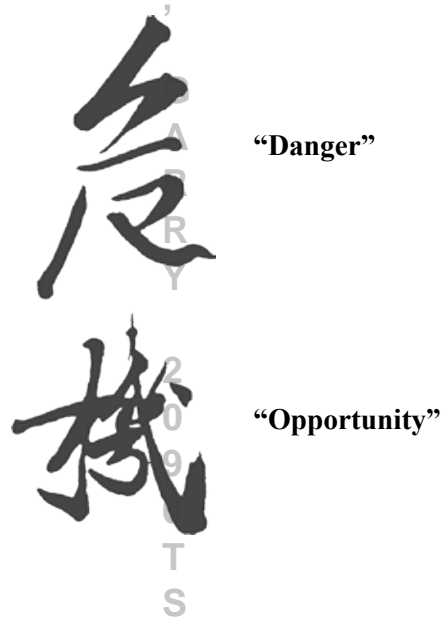
Attitude plays an important role in dealing with stress. To a degree, stress is determined in the mind. Two people can suffer setbacks. One may become stronger and wiser for the experience, while the other may never recover and may actually worsen. Often, the difference is that one focuses on the positive and the other on the negative. Michael Scheier and Charles Carver cite extensive research showing that optimism as an explanatory style is an important construct that has beneficial influence on coping and well-being. In contrast, pessimism as an explanatory style leads to anxiety, depression, inertia, and a general feeling of unhappiness.<sup>21</sup>

Do not close your eyes to the truth, but avoid negative thinking. A positive mental attitude helps you tolerate life's ups and downs and gives you strength to overcome problems. Optimism and positive thinking are contagious. Your good attitude will rub off on others; so smile—it will help others and help yourself as well. Remember the World War II song:

You've got to accentuate the positive,  
Eliminate the negative,  
Latch on to the affirmative,  
Don't mess with Mr. Inbetween.

The Chinese have a symbol for “crisis” consisting of two characters, each with a separate meaning (see Figure 4.2). The upper character represents danger, and the lower character stands for opportunity. The healthful view accentuates opportunity, as opposed to danger, in a crisis.

**Figure 4.2 Crisis: Opportunity within Danger**



A corollary to accentuating the positive is to reframe or change the way you interpret an event or situation. An event such as a job change becomes more stressful if you see it as a traumatic upheaval rather than an exciting new adventure or challenge in your life. In the process of reframing, tap the power of selftalk. Many of us are unaware of the influence of internal dialogue, much less that we have the power to change it. Instead of saying “I’m too old” or “I’m too slow,” say “I am experienced and I am deliberate.”<sup>22</sup>

The technique of *mental music* can be a helpful application of self-talk. Imagine two job applicants preparing for an interview. The music and picture in one person’s mind are from the movie *Jaws*, while the other person hears the theme from *Rocky* and imagines success. Tremendous advantage can be gained by playing positive mental music. What music do you play in your own mind to accentuate the positive?

By emphasizing the positive versus the negative, you can feel more optimistic; and this can lead to positive actions and results. Charles Swindoll explains succinctly and well the importance of attitude:

#### **Attitude**

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company . . . a church . . . a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change the past . . . we cannot change the fact that other people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. . . . I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you . . . we are each in charge of our own attitude.<sup>23</sup>

As a balance to this idea, psychologist Edward Chang cautions against overreliance on optimism and suggests that in some cases pessimism may serve a useful function. He advises striking an ideal balance between general optimism as a dominant orientation and situation-specific pessimism when conditions warrant. Popularly, this has been phrased as “Expect the best and be prepared for the worst.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Fifteen—improve job proficiency**

Developing technical knowledge, increasing practical experience, and learning human relations skills are excellent ways to manage stress in the workplace. Important skills that help reduce job stress are communication, teamwork, and effective use of time for all personnel, as well as leadership, delegation, and coaching skills for management personnel.

### **Sixteen—trust in time**

Many of life’s events are painful, and it may seem as though the anguish will never end. Although time may not heal all wounds, it often helps. If you suffer a loss in your personal or professional life and you feel your world has collapsed, there is a good possibility that within a year or two the pain will be gone, and you may even be stronger for the experience. As Charles

Dickens wrote in *David Copperfield*, “The best metal has been through the fire.” And as John Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost*, “Our torments also, in length of time, become our elements.” Finally, Ecclesiastes 3 states: “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to sow seed, and a time to pluck up that which is planted . . .” Sometimes, our only choice in a stressful period is to “trust in time.”

## **Coping review**

The whole process of managing stress requires three basic steps:

1. Be aware of stressful situations in your life.
2. Take action to reduce harmful stress.
3. Use stress-coping techniques that work for you.

Regarding point three, Mark Twain once said, “Habits cannot be thrown out the window. They must be coaxed downstairs one step at a time.” With this in mind, identify the coping techniques that you need to try: (1) Introduce more balance and avoid extremes in your life. (2) Work smarter, not necessarily harder. (3) Share the load, and in so doing develop others. (4) Learn when, how, and why to say no. (5) Escape for a while. (6) Make the decompression chamber technique work for you. (7) Share feelings, reduce tension, and talk it out. (8) Be less critical and more accepting, both of yourself and of others. (9) Worry less and do more. (10) Slow down and enjoy the little things in life. (11) Focus on the needs of others. (12) Handle hassles healthfully. (13) Have a hobby. (14) Focus on the positive in your life. (15) Develop skills to help you reduce job stress. (16) Let time be a healer.

Notice that none of these principles promotes laziness or lack of achievement. Indeed, most accomplishments require hard work, and great achievements make life worth living. The point is not only to succeed, but to live to enjoy success. In this regard, when you consider the meaning of success, remember Cervantes’ advice in *Don Quixote*: “The road is better than the inn.”<sup>25</sup>

As the following account shows, most people can benefit by following coping techniques for managing stress:

### **Stress hits home**

I never really knew what pain was until my wife had a stroke and I thought she might die. Then I thought she might live and feel but not be able to think. During those hours, for the first time, I knew the true meaning of grief. It is overwhelming and unbearable pain that you know will affect you forever. Only with her illness did I realize how helpful stress coping techniques could be. Until then, the subject had been academic. Now it was real. I found it ironic that I would be the one to benefit the most from the ideas we had gathered and presented in *Stress without Distress* in 1988. That’s when I realized these principles truly are wisdom of the ages.— Author’s file notes (G. M.)

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# Chapter Five

## Characteristics of a Hardy Personality

### The stress-resistant person

In *Crucibles of Leadership*, Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas identify a critical human attribute—adaptive capacity, the ability to transcend adversity and emerge stronger than before. Like a phoenix, the Egyptian mythical bird that perished by fire and then rose from its ashes to live another day, life demands resilience, the ability to survive even the most negative experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Some people are stress-resistant. These are hardy individuals who are able to accomplish tremendous tasks and still remain healthy. Stress-resistant people seem comfortable in almost any situation. Their lives are full, yet unhurried. They are relaxed and confident, even when they are making critical decisions. Physically fit and seldom tired, they project a sense of control and strength.

The stress-resistant person lives a life of balance and alignment. Actions taken are consistent with thoughts and feelings. From this flows a sense of wholeness and integrity that gives the stress-resistant person the ability to be resourceful and creative even under the most difficult circumstances.

There are many models for successful living. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard thought that people could be divided into types—some are drifters and others are drivers, some are takers and others are givers. He believed that the fully functioning person would not drift aimlessly through life, but would be guided by a sense of purpose; and he believed the fully developed person would honor, protect, and care for others. Further, he believed these qualities would add to the well-being of the individual and society. To personal commitment and caring relationships, add having a sense of personal control, maintaining a positive mental attitude, and keeping life in perspective to describe the characteristics of a hardy personality.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of hardiness as a personality construct was first introduced by Susan Kobasa in 1979. Since then, it has been cited in hundreds of academic papers published in more than one hundred different journals. The interest in the concept stems from the fact that it addresses the mind-body relationship with a focus on health instead of illness, and with a positive image of the person as an active and purposeful agent.

## Application: A Star to Live By

The following questionnaire features the five characteristics of a hardy personality. Rate yourself on each characteristic at this time (1 is low, 20 is high).

### Commitment

The Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle said, “We don’t fear extinction, we fear extinction without meaning.”<sup>3</sup> This entails having a purpose in life and being true to one’s values. The hardy personality thinks he knows what is important and that he is doing the right thing. This translates into *commitment* that gives tremendous strength to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity. The committed person is emotionally strong, and this emotional strength, like a wonder drug, results in physical strength as well. Where does commitment begin? It begins with choosing to be an active participant in life, not a bystander. With involvement comes understanding. Only when we understand will we care. Only when we care will we be committed. Only when we are committed will we make a difference in the world. **Rate yourself on commitment.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

### Control

In *Don Juan in Hell*, George Bernard Shaw wrote, “Hell is to drift, heaven is to steer.”<sup>4</sup> The hardy personality believes this idea fully, and seeks to *control* her own life. When asked the question, “Who is in charge, the world or you?”, the hardy personality’s answer is “Me.” She sees herself as the master of her own destiny, the captain of her own ship, not the pawn of fate and not flotsam on the sea of life. What gives legitimacy to this feeling is the fact that the hardy personality has mastered and employs effective time management principles. She sets goals in line with her values, keeps a daily “to do” list with priorities indicated, works on first things first, and checks off tasks as they are completed. **Rate yourself on sense of control and practicing effective time management principles.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

### Attitude

The hardy personality lives by William James’s prescription: “Change your *attitude*—change your life.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike the pessimist who builds dungeons in the air, the hardy personality accentuates the positive. He recognizes the influence of mind over matter and therefore chooses to think positive thoughts that elicit positive moods that result in positive actions.<sup>6</sup> This doesn’t mean he denies reality; the opposite is true. He sees life as it is, both good and bad. But once seen, he emphasizes possibilities over problems, strengths over weaknesses, and potentialities over deficiencies, both in the situation and in himself. In the area of attitude, the hardy personality practices three key habits—expect greatness, strive for the best, and appreciate any good that results. The hardy personality agrees with Hans Selye, who prescribed a technique for optimism—“Imitate the sundial’s ways; count only the pleasant days.” Because the hardy personality is an optimist, he is energized and focused; and with energy and focus, he indeed achieves his goals.<sup>7</sup> **Rate yourself on attitude.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

### Perspective

The hardy personality keeps life in *perspective* and doesn’t get upset over small matters. She

realizes, in the final analysis, most matters are small matters. Consequently she doesn't develop a full-blown fight-or-flight response to every minor hassle, obstacle, or setback. In this way, she avoids unnecessary states of alarm and vigilance leading to exhaustion and breakdown. The hardy personality realizes there is a need for the hot-reacting linebacker in times of defense, but she prefers to remain the cool-thinking quarterback on offense.<sup>8</sup> One way she does this is to remember what is important (her hills worth dying on). All else is viewed with tolerance and patience as matters of style, taste, and individual differences that can enrich the world. **Rate yourself on keeping things in perspective.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

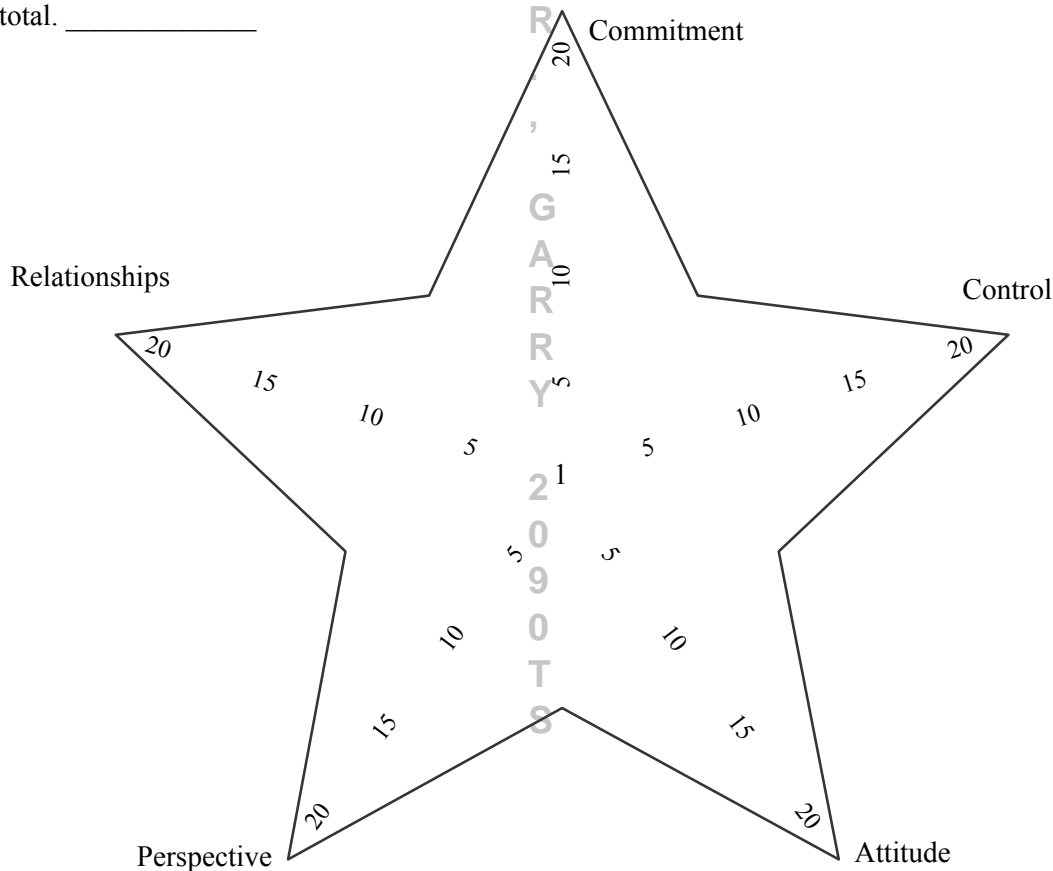
### Relationships

For the masses of people most of the time, concern for others is the most important characteristic of a hardy personality. He develops caring relationships in his home life, work life, and community at large. He gives tender loving care (TLC) to all creatures, great and small; and as he sows, so he reaps. The hardy personality gives love, and in turn is beloved.<sup>9</sup> In this process, physiological responses are generated that are life enhancing and life prolonging, helping to explain the hardy personality's ability to overcome germs and disease and maintain good health in spite of heavy responsibilities and demanding schedules. **Rate yourself on TLC.**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

### Scoring

Indicate your scores for each characteristic on the following star. Add your scores to obtain a total. \_\_\_\_\_



## Evaluation

**Scores 90–100 = A** You currently embody the characteristics of a hardy personality. You are doing all that you can to succeed in life, plus live to enjoy it. You are a model for psychological strength and effective living.

**Scores 80–89 = B** This is a high score. Your life is characterized by an effective pattern of *personal commitment, sense of control, positive attitude, balanced perspective, and caring relationships*.

**Scores 70–79 = C** You do some things well, but need to improve in others. To improve, focus on low spots and take positive steps to change yourself or the situation.

**Scores 60–69 = D** D stands for deficiencies. This means you must improve, not only to succeed in your life, but to live to enjoy it. Low scores for commitment, control, attitude, perspective, and relationships should be addressed.

**Scores 59–below = F** F is for falling short. You should begin immediately to raise the quality of your life. Advice and support from others can be helpful. Attention and a sustained effort are required.

## Discussion

Lives are defined largely by the points on our stars: commitment, control, attitude, perspective, and relationships. Our lives, like stars, can be bright or dim. This is determined by the choices we make. These decisions are freely made, so we are each responsible for the consequences of our own actions and reactions.

It is not the score one has that counts; it is what is done about it that matters. If you are currently low in one or more of the characteristics of a hardy personality, take concrete action to improve, and in so doing enhance your life. If you are high in an area, you should continue to capitalize on this strength and asset for effective living.

The five characteristics of a hardy personality are moving targets you must keep your eye upon. This is a lifelong challenge, meaning that just because you have a high score today, it doesn't guarantee a high score tomorrow. Also, it is never too late to improve. Doing so at any point in time is worthwhile, resulting in a fuller and more satisfying life.

After heredity, the three most important influences in our lives are the people we are around, the messages we give ourselves, and the books we read. Along with religious and inspirational books that mean so much to so many millions, there are five books that are particularly helpful in developing the characteristics of a hardy personality. To brighten your star, read these books and apply them to your life.

For commitment, read *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl.

For control, read *First Things First* by Stephen Covey.

For attitude, read *Learned Optimism* by Martin Seligman.

For perspective, read *Is It Worth Dying For?* by Robert Eliot.

For relationships, read *The Art of Loving* by Erich Fromm.

### The stress-prone versus the stress-resistant personality

Habits are like people, in that some are good for you and others are not. Figure 5.1 contrasts a day in the life of a stress-prone versus a stress-resistant personality. Multiply these days by weeks, months, and years, and you can see the important influence the characteristics of a hardy personality can have in determining the quality and length of your life.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 5.1 A Day in the Life of Mr. A and Mr. B**

Time Line	Mr. A's stress-prone path	Time Line	Mr. B's stress-resistant path
7:00 A.M. Alarm goes off.	<i>Thoughts:</i> The first thing he thinks of is last night's argument. The second is the battle ahead. He resolves to be vigilant.	7:00 A.M.. Alarm goes off.	<i>Thoughts:</i> The first thing he thinks about is last night's get-together. Good times should be relished. His second thought is for the day ahead. He knows he will do his best.
	<i>Actions:</i> He hurries through showering and dressing, and walks out the door, calling good-bye to his wife		<i>Actions:</i> He showers and dresses and takes time to have breakfast. He gives his wife an affectionate good-bye hug and kiss.
8:15 A.M.	He sees snow on the car, and the roads are icy. He is furious, because he doesn't have a scraper.	8:15 A.M.	He sees snow on the car, and the streets are icy, but he is calm because he has a scraper and a shovel and is prepared for bad weather.
8:30 A.M. Traffic is slow.	<i>Action:</i> He honks the horn, grips the wheel, gnashes his teeth, and yells at bad drivers.	8:30 A.M. Traffic is slow.	<i>Action:</i> He goes with the flow, realizing that getting upset will not change the conditions. He listens to the radio.
	<i>Result:</i> Blood pressure and pulse rate go up. He arrives at work angry and tense.		<i>Result:</i> He remains calm and relaxed and arrives at work fresh and alert.
9:00 A.M.– 11:00 A.M.	<i>Events:</i> Unimportant meetings follow disorganized meetings, and frustration goes up. He becomes increasingly resentful, angry, and worried because of wasted time.	9:00 A.M.– 11:00 A.M.	<i>Events:</i> There is a sense of progress and satisfaction as well-run meetings support important goals.
11:00 A.M.– 12:30 P.M.	Emotions heat up when a customer complains and an employee gets angry.	1:00 A.M.– 12:30 A.M.	When a customer and an employee fail to communicate, he remains calm.
	<i>Reaction:</i> If people don't like the way things are going, they can go elsewhere. This is a free country. Besides, complaints and problems are hassles I don't need.		<i>Reaction:</i> When people complain or get upset, it gives me a chance to share information, learn something important, and try to improve things by developing a common ground.

Time Line	Mr. A's stress-prone path	Time Line	Mr. B's stress-resistant path
	<i>Action:</i> He delegates the problem to a subordinate and gets into a shouting match with another customer.		<i>Action:</i> He meets with the customer and employee personally. He takes the time to listen and understand their concerns. He takes their grievances seriously and is responsive to their suggestions.
12:30 P.M. Lunch break  Behind	<i>Action:</i> He eats at his desk with a telephone in one hand and a pencil, candy bar, and coffee sharing the other.	12:30 P.M. Lunch break On schedule	<i>Action:</i> He escapes for a while by taking a walk in the park. He eats yogurt and a banana on a bench.
	<i>Effect:</i> Stress builds as he feels chained to his chair; indigestion sets in.		<i>Effect:</i> Exercise and nutrition are healthy, and getting away from the office helps put things in perspective.
1:00 P.M. Board meeting starts.	<i>Mental State:</i> Coming off a working lunch, he feels fragmented and ill-prepared.	1:00 P.M. Board meeting starts.	<i>Mental State:</i> He returns from lunch energized and focused, ready to give his best to the important meeting ahead.
2:30 P.M. Modest progress made.	<i>Thoughts:</i> This group couldn't change a light bulb in a weekend. We aren't accomplishing a thing! If they don't get their act together, this company's going down the tube.	2:30 P.M. Modest progress made.	<i>Thoughts:</i> We were slow today, but we did make progress. We need to celebrate these victories and learn from our shortcomings. If we work together, I think we'll succeed.
4:00 P.M. Board meeting ends.	<i>Action:</i> He goes to the bar for a quick drink and to lament the wasted day. One drink leads to another as he tries to forget his problems.	4:00 P.M. Board meeting ends.	<i>Action:</i> He goes to his office to summarize thoughts while they are fresh and to return telephone calls in a timely manner. 5:30 P.M. finds him exercising (three times a week).
7:00 P.M. Arrive home.	<i>Action:</i> He has dinner with the family. Interaction goes from polite conversation to active argument.	7:00 P.M. Arrive home.	<i>Action:</i> He has dinner with the family. Interaction goes from discussion to dialogue.
	<i>Effect:</i> Stress goes up; tension leads to headache; indigestion develops.		<i>Effect:</i> Happiness and a sense of well-being are experienced.
8:00 P.M.	Everyone watches television—alone.	8:00 P.M.	He helps his son make a kite and helps his daughter with her homework.
	<i>Result:</i> Self-absorption develops and loneliness sets in.		<i>Results:</i> Responsibility is taught and relationships grow.

Time Line	Mr. A's stress-prone path	Time Line	Mr. B's stress-resistant path
10:00 P.M. Disagreement occurs with teenage son.	He is tired and his patience is thin. He launches into attack and "wins" by intimidation.	10:00 P.M. Disagreement occurs with teenage son.	He garners his energy and seeks the facts. He talks <i>with</i> his son, not <i>at</i> him, and gives reasons for his views. Father and son reach agreement together.
11:00 P.M. Goes to bed.	<i>Action:</i> Can't sleep; tosses and turns for two hours.	11:00 P.M. Goes to bed.	<i>Action:</i> Falls asleep quickly.
	<i>Thoughts:</i> What is wrong with everybody? Why can't things be smooth instead of a constant struggle? All I do is work and worry, work and worry. The truth is, I'm fed up.		<i>Thoughts:</i> This has been a good day. There is much to appreciate—family, good health, good job.
	<i>Result:</i> Wakes up at 7:00 A.M. exhausted and depressed.		<i>Result:</i> Wakes up at 7:00 A.M. refreshed and happy.

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## Personal Thoughts on Personality and Stress

Answer the following questions to personalize the content of Part Two. Space is provided for writing your thoughts.

- Of the sixteen principles for dealing with stress, which appeal to you? Which have you seen work for others?

- Think about a stressful time in your life. What did you do to improve or cope with the situation? What lessons did you learn?

- Do you currently embody the characteristics of a hardy personality? If not, what can you do to improve? What steps should you take?

- Picture yourself twenty years from today. Do you see yourself in a positive state? Are you fulfilled, at peace, a model of energy and vitality for your age? Or do you see yourself in a negative state—worn out, weakened by poor health, embittered by unfulfilled goals? Your future is largely your choice. You are busy today working full time to make one of these pictures come true.

## Related Reading

*A Walk in the Woods*, by Bill Bryson: Walking the Appalachian Trail

## Related Web Sites

American Medical Association Health Insight ([www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/3158.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/3158.html))

Anger Management ([www.angermgmt.com](http://www.angermgmt.com))

Emotions ([www.apa.org/topics](http://www.apa.org/topics))

Mental Health ([www.cmhc.com](http://www.cmhc.com))

National Institute of Mental Health ([www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov))

Stress Management ([www.stressrelease.com](http://www.stressrelease.com))

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## Chapter Five References

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- <sup>5</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt, 1890); and C. Peterson, "The Future of Optimism," *American Psychologist* 55 (2000): 45-55.
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- <sup>7</sup> Seligman, *Learned Optimism*.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert S. Eliot and Dennis L. Breo, *Is It Worth Dying For?* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989); and R. Eliot, *From Stress to Strength* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994).
- <sup>9</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Bantam Books, 1963); and R. Niaura et al., "Hostility, The Metabolic Syndrome and Incident Coronary Heart Disease," *Health Psychology* 2, (2002): 588-593; P. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954).
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