STRESSMASTERY GUIDE
“Don’t Just Manage Stress...MASTER IT”

By
James C. Petersen, Ph.D.
“The Mind is its own place and in it
Can make a Hell of Heaven or a
Heaven of Hell.”

John Milton

Disclaimer:
Regardless of your scores, if you are in acute distress or feel that life is hopeless, seek out a competent mental health professional immediately. This GUIDE is not intended to replace good quality medical and psychological assistance. If you need help, seek it out today! The materials provided by Stressmaster and Dr. James Petersen are for educational purposes only and not to be construed as providing a medical diagnosis or psychological services.

This GUIDE may be produced only one time by the person who has taken the Online SMQ. Do not duplicate, copy or disseminate in any form without written permission from Dr. James Petersen.

STRESSMASTER is an international stress management consulting, training, and publishing company headquartered in Phoenix, AZ.

© 1982-2015 James C. Petersen, Ph.D./Stressmaster
All Rights Reserved. No copy in any form may be made of any portion of this document. No content may be used without the expressed written permission of James C. Petersen, Ph.D.
ABOUT THE SMQ SCALES

The STRESSMASTERY GUIDE provides information on the meaning of each Stress Management Questionnaire (SMQ) scale along with WHAT TO KNOW and WHAT TO DO if you scored high on any given scale.

The SMQ is both a personal stress “risk” assessment and an educational tool that can help you to identify and understand your Stress Warning Signs, types of Stressors you are currently facing and the possible Effects of Stress on your health and well-being. The SMQ is comprised of 11 scales in three (3) separate stress categories; they are:

**I - STRESS WARNING SIGN SCALES**

The Stress Warning Sign Scales are the result of a validation study conducted and funded by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (Petersen, J. and Lawrence, H. NIOSH, 1982). The specific scales are:

- Hostility/Anger (HO)
- Perfectionism (PE)
- Time-Urgency (TI)
- Disappointment (DI)
- Burnout (BR)
- Underachievement (UA)
- Tension (TE)

**II - STRESS EFFECTS SCALES**

The Stress Effects Scales shows how stress may be affecting you at both a physical and emotional level. The two scales are:

- Physical Stress Effects (PE)
- Life Work Satisfaction (LW)

**III - STRESSOR SCALES**

The Stressor Scales reflect the two major types of stressors that are known to be a cause or “trigger” of the stress response. The two scales are:

- Life Events (LE)
- Hassles (HA)
Each SMQ scale provides a view of one important aspect of stress and how it may be affecting you at this time. Your “Risk Level” relates to the possibility of having or developing stress-related physical, behavioral or emotional issues. Having a high score on any given scale indicates that you may be at “risk” of developing stress related problems, but it does not mean you will necessarily experience any problems. Use the concept of “risk” as a “warning sign” not as an absolute.

The SMQ is based upon a research and validation study conducted by Dr. James Petersen and Mr. Harry Lawrence through a grant from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. (NIOSH, 1982). Each scales is normed and your scores are compared to the study group. Based on your responses to the 87 SMQ questions, you were placed in a High, Medium-High, Medium, Medium-Low or Low “Risk” area for each of the 11 SMQ scales. The research showed that high to Medium High scores on one or more of the 7 Stress Warning Sign Scales are associated with such physical problems as: headaches, cardiovascular disease, digestion and bowel problems, or emotional issues like burnout or excessive tension. But some people score high but do not experience any of these problems. There are many factors that can prevent or delay the development of stress related problems. Some of these factors will be explained later in this Guide.

A High or Medium High score on any of the SMQ scales is a warning to look more closely to determine what you can do to reduce or change your level of stress. A high or medium-high score on more than one of the Seven Stress Warning Sign Scales puts you at greater risk of developing stress-related problems. Everyone is different, so use this information to see if stress is causing you physical or emotional problems and make your own determination of what if anything you need to change.

A Medium score on any of the SMQ scales places you in a borderline situation. Check to see if stress is becoming a problem for you now. Determine if you could do more to improve your response to life’s stressors and daily hassles. If you have a positive attitude, feel in control of your life and have few health issues, you probably have low “risk”. However, if you feel that things are not improving in your life or work, are experiencing more stress than usual, or you do not feel in control of important situations, then begin to apply some of the techniques shared in the STRESSMASTERY GUIDE.

If your scores fall into the Medium-Low to Low on one or more scales, chances are you are doing better than most people and your stress response is not likely to be very high. Keep up the good work. However, be on the alert for the encroachment of stressors in your life and a deterioration of how well you are mastering those stressors. Your scores can change over time.
I: SEVEN STRESS WARNING SIGNS

How did you do on each of the SMQ scales? Place an (X) in the space below that corresponds to your “Risk” score obtained from your SMQ results from the first section. Your SMQ results will guide you in identifying your stress “warning” signs and in discovering new and more effective ways to master stress. The seven scales that make up the Stress Warning Signs are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium-Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Medium-High</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hostility/Anger (HO)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism (PE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Urgency (TE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointment (DI)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout (BR)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underachievement (UA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension (TE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE?
List or describe the behaviors you want to change at work and/or home.
HOSTILITY/ANGER SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

The research on anger and stress is widely studied and is clear... Anger is the number one behavioral factor most highly correlated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, myocardial infarction and high blood pressure. Other physical and behavioral stress problems are also known to be directly influenced by stress. For example, gastrointestinal or stomach problems have a high correlation with anger. The Hostility/Anger Scale (HO) scale assesses the degree to which you are experiencing frustration and anger at this time.

WHAT TO KNOW

A high level of anger is a strong behavioral predictor of early illness, disease and, possibly, even death. This scale measures such things as irritability, anger, and impatience and is also one of the classic Type-A behaviors. If you scored medium to high on this scale, it may be wise to find more constructive and appropriate ways of dealing with your angry thoughts and, ultimately, how you interact with others.

Most anger is harmful and counterproductive; it undermines relationships and can result in both physical and emotional scars. Anger is most often expressed in the form of verbal abuse, such as the “putting-down” or yelling at a child, spouse or even a coworker when they do not meet your expectations or needs.

Anger is also revealed when someone physically hits or bullies a person. Physical abuse and bullying are all too often a common occurrence in homes, schools and workplaces. People die because someone has lost control of his or her temper and actually killed someone they loved. All too often we hear on the news about someone who exploded in “road rage” and killed a complete stranger.

Anger is a way to control the actions and feelings of others through coercion. People often use anger as an emotional hammer to get what they want. While anger can be expressed directly by lashing out, it can also be shown indirectly through passive-aggressive behavior. With passive-aggressive behavior, individuals punish others by being belligerent, not responding, pouting or simply running away; this is emotional bondage that is, unfortunately, often effective at controlling others.

WHAT TO DO

Determine if the anger you feel is excessive or harmful to you or those around you. If anger has affected you and, possibly, your loved ones or friends, it may be time to develop new ways of thinking and interacting with others.

The key to controlling anger is learning to change your thoughts about the person or situation. When anger erupts, the first step is to recognize that you are, in fact, angry. Knowing that you are in an agitated “angry state” and possibly not in control of your words or actions, means it is time to STOP, THINK and RELAX. Force yourself to recognize there is a better way to deal with people who fail to meet your expectations.

www.STRESSMASTER.com
FEAR DRIVES ANGER

Since fear is the engine that most often drives people to do such offensive things such as hit, yell or scream at someone, ask yourself, “What am I afraid of right now?” Chances are you are experiencing anxiety and fear that the person will not do what you expect. As a result, you may feel anxious when you are not in control and react disproportionately.

If anger is a challenge for you, recognize that the need to control others is often unrealistic and counter-productive. If anxiety about a situation or person is high, work to change or modify your thinking about that situation or individual. Once you do, you will be able to master your fear more effectively and your response to the stressor that irritates you will be much more appropriate and effective.

WORK ON “LETTING GO”

“Letting go” is the key to freeing yourself from excessive anger. Our culture teaches us to always take action and maintain control. While this approach is good in some situations, it is harmful when there is no real threat. By “letting go,” you will actually gain control over your responses. When you do become aware of any excessive anger, aggression or hostility toward others, you can begin to talk to yourself in a more effective way.

Flow! Don’t try to control fear, flow with it. The more you focus on fear...the more you get. Once you have recognized the fear behind your anger, you can give yourself permission to let it go. Doing so will allow the fear to flow through and then out of you. Energy is wasted trying to push away from our fears. Unfortunately, this keeps us smack in the middle of our fear and anxiety. Accept that the feared condition has occurred and take positive steps to change or make the best of the situation.

WORK ON SELF-ESTEEM

Most people experience some frustration and anger from time to time. It is normal. However, a positive and productive expression of that anger is essential. A good sense of self-esteem or self-worth will enable you to express anger and frustration in a more effective way.

When self-esteem improves, it is possible to accept others for who they are and to resist the use of anger to get your way. For example, you might say to yourself:

“I can let go and it’s OK.
Letting go does not mean I’m out of control.”

“I can let go and still feel in control.”

“Letting go makes me feel better.
That will make the situation better.”

“I don’t need anger to change this person or situation at this time.”

“Anger is not controlling me,
I am the master of my anger.”

“I’m not an angry person. ANGER is destructive.
I will raise myself above this anger and LET GO.”

BE PREPARED FOR ANGER

Get prepared for anger—it is going to happen. Think about when you get angry. Who do you get angry with and why? Write down or make a mental note of when you feel anger or express it either outwardly toward others or inwardly toward yourself. By becoming aware of the circumstances that trigger anger you will be better prepared to STOP ANGER in its tracks.
Re-think how you will respond differently when others do not live up to your expectations. You may not always succeed, but if you make the effort you will make progress. Look for small successes and reward yourself for progress.

**USE “I-MESSAGES”**

“I-Messages” are effective ways to communicate with others and can defuse a potentially explosive situation. Use “I-Messages” as alternatives to screaming and yelling. “I-Messages” take the form of telling the person how you feel because of what they did or did not do. “I-Messages” focus on behavior, not the person as a human being. For example, a common anger expression might be: “You idiot! Where have you been? You said you’d be home by 10 and here it is midnight. You’re a stupid, no-good kid. Get out of my sight.”

An “I-Message” alternative would be: “When you don’t call me or let me know when you’re coming home, I feel you may have been hurt. I was worried about you. It is important for you to call me. I know you want to be independent, but let’s discuss boundaries and limits. I don’t hate you. I’m upset with your behavior.” “I-Messages” should express how you are affected by another’s behavior.

**SET REALISTIC GOALS**

Sometimes when we get angry at our own lack of progress, that anger is reflected or redirected at others. When we do not reach our goals, desires and hopes, frustration and feeling anger can be the result. By setting realistic goals for yourself, you will feel better and less frustrated. The net result is that you become a better person to those around you. Finally, when you see even small successes, tell yourself that you are making progress and be sure to reassure yourself that you are making progress.

**AVOID “SHOULD’S”**

Setting high expectations for yourself or others is a problem that can lead to stress and even more anger. You know you are setting unrealistic expectations when you find yourself frequently saying that people should be or do something other than what they are actually capable of.

Engaging in these “shouldisms” is often self-destructive and usually harmful to your relationships with others. Examples of “shouldisms” are:

- “She/he should be more loving.”
- “When I walk into a room, people should immediately say hello to me.”
- “When I assigned her the job, she should have completed it right away.”
- “They should show me more respect. After all, I’m their superior. I deserve it.”
PERFECTIONISM SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

The Perfectionism Scale assesses the need to think and behave in perfectionistic ways toward yourself and others. Perfectionism is not the search for excellence – it is the search for unobtainable and unrealistic goals, standards and expectations. The net result is stress...both internally as well as externally with coworkers, family and friends.

WHAT TO KNOW

A high score on the Perfectionism Scale is correlated with chronic health and emotional problems and is an important stress warning sign. Individuals caught up in perfectionist thinking and behavior can experience significant personal distress accompanied by physical and emotional problems. Their unrealistically high standards and quest to avoid failure can also produce strong negative responses from others who may not share the same values or standards. If you scored high or medium on the Perfectionism Scale, recognize that your perfectionism may be damaging to your health and quality of life.

Perfectionism is a learned behavior. It is the result of years of external (imposed by others) and internal (self-imposed) pressure to improve one’s own performance. Perfectionistic thinking is based on the unrealistic belief that, “Unless I am perfect, I am not okay.” Perfectionists believe they cannot be happy unless they are perfect. Over time, this can increase the stress response and cause health and social problems.

WHAT TO DO

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Perfectionists should re-evaluate and, when appropriate, readjust their expectations for themselves, as well as for others who do not meet their needs. Most perfectionists set extremely high standards for themselves and others. Setting high standards is not the problem. Setting standards that cannot be realistically attained can be emotionally damaging to you as well as to others whom you care about.

Determine if you are trying to do too much, for too many and in too short a time period. Ask: “Am I expecting too much from others, particularly those close to me?”. Perhaps you have expectations for a child, coworkers, boss, or your spouse that are unreasonable. Goals that “stretch” people are fine and desirable. Goals that “break” people create stress.
MASTER FEAR OF FAILURE

Since fear of failure motivates the perfectionist, one should ask: “What is the worst thing that could happen if I didn’t do this task perfectly? What if I am not perceived as being perfect?” Generally, the answer to these questions is not as dire as one might imagine. People will not reject you or think less of you if things are not perfect. The imagined consequences are typically greater than reality.

EXCELLENCE NOT PERFECTION

Practice leaving some things undone or less “perfect” than your normal performance. Most things can wait a day or two. Distinguish between life’s essentials and nonessentials, so you know where to place your time and energy. Misplaced effort results in disappointment. Some tasks need to be done very well; others can be done less perfectly or even haphazardly. Strive for excellence only when excellence is required; be perfectionistic only when perfectionism is really achievable.

ACCEPT WHAT COMES, THEN IMPROVE

Not reaching your goals does not mean you are a failure. Failure is relative to your ideals and expectations. Keeping standards reasonable does not mean you will necessarily develop an ineffective program, product or that you might produce less. It is well known that many people only succeed after repeated “failures”. For many, it can actually contribute to their eventual success.

Focus on “letting go.” There is a time to turn off the computer, put the pen down, turn the phone off and call it a day. When you let go, stress will flow away from you. The result is that you actually feel better and become more relaxed.

Perfectionists often do not know their needs or how to meet them. When you stop and take time for yourself, your deeper needs will begin to rise into your awareness. To fulfill those deeper needs, you must fight the mental tapes that you unconsciously say to yourself such as: “Do more, be better, work harder and never stop.”

Try talking to yourself in a kinder and more positive way. For example, use words that reassure yourself such as, “I am a good person. I did the best that I can do. I can rest now. I do not need to be perfect in everything I do. I will let go of all unrealistic expectations and do something just for myself.”

We all use self-talk to direct our behaviors and actions. Changing your self-talk and using new and more positive words will make a difference in how you feel. Make the phrase, “Let it go”, become an integral part of your thinking and stress will automatically dissipate.
TIME-URGENCY SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

Today more people than ever are in a great rush to move faster, work harder and do more in less time. While a “go get ’em” attitude can be the spark which makes great things happen, an excessive amount of Time-Urgency can cause personal stress. With the explosion in information technology, constant text messaging and e-mailing, living each day attached to your “smart” phone, the external and internal pressure we place upon ourselves to do more and to do it quicker is causing increased physical and emotional stress problems.

WHAT TO KNOW

Time-Urgency is a result of several factors including unrealistic expectations, poor time management and procrastination. The term Time Management is a bit confusing...we really don’t manage time...we manage ourselves with respect to time. If you are good at slowing down a bit, living in the moment and recognize that not everything should be done in a rush...your sense of Time-Urgency will be reduced and so will your stress.

Excessive Time-Urgency is a classic component of the Type-A personality characteristics. Individuals who are in a constant state of Time-Urgency have a higher risk of physical problems like cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and other health problems than those who work at a more relaxed and steady pace. In effect, excessive Time-Urgency keeps the stress response in high gear which has a direct impact on one’s overall level of stress.

Individuals who constantly perceive life in a time-urgent way tend to worry excessively about schedules, set overly-tight deadlines, rush when rushing is not necessary and constantly multi-task. These self-defeating behaviors and thoughts create stress and rob you from enjoyment in your work and play.

The key is to develop solid time mastery skills that will enable you to “walk” not “run” through life. If you scored medium to high on this scale, slow down and take life and events as they are and not as you think they should be. Learn to manage your time and you will help defeat this negative thinking.

WHAT TO DO

MAKE TIME YOUR FRIEND

Time can be your enemy or your friend. When time is your friend, you take a more relaxed approach to work and play. If you make time your enemy, you see time being drained away and your anxiety increased.

Time-Urgency is a perception problem. Everyone has some time pressure to get things done, meet occasional tight deadlines, and have places to go. This behavior is now common in our accelerated society. When you place everything under time pressure, stress erupts. Re-think your view of time. Ask: “Does my sense of time-urgency reflect what is really important to me?” Putting events and tasks in their perspective will make a big difference in how you feel and how well you function.
SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

Practice doing some things slowly. Not all tasks need to be done quickly. Take a child’s view in which tasks are done in the time it takes to do them. When you are talking with people, LISTEN more than you talk. Little is learned when we do the talking. By listening more and talking less you slow down and actually hear what the other person is saying. Under stress, our ability to interpret what a person is saying is reduced. Quiet listening reduces stress.

GET ORGANIZED

Lack of organization in the home or office is a major contributor to causing Time-Urgency to even exist. One key problem that leads to delays is an inability to find important documents, files or items that are needed. When they are not available and time runs short, the fear of failure or being late (rejection) crops up. The result that follows is always being late or rushing to an appointment.

SEPARATE WORK FROM PLAY

Keep work and play separate. Work does have more time requirements than play. Don’t apply the requirements of work to your social gatherings. Think about it... do you behave as though social activities are board meetings?

BE A GOOD PLANNER

Rushing around may indicate a deeper problem such as poor planning skills. Do you know which things are more important than others? Do you fall into the trap of “failing to plan” and then wind up rushing at the last minute to get the job done? Evaluate your planning and organizing skills to see if you can reduce the stress caused by poor planning.

CHANGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Expecting that you must always do more and do it faster is at the root of a Time-Urgency problem. Determine if you are trying to do more than you are reasonably capable of doing. Focus on one thing at a time. Try to keep expectations of yourself and others in-line with reality. Since negative “self-talk” and improper expectations are the cause of your stress, learn to constantly check what you are expecting of yourself and others. Ask yourself, “Is this a reasonable and realistic expectation?” If not, change your expectation. If your expectation is realistic, then go forward with the task.

MASTER YOUR FEAR OF REJECTION

Many people operating in the “hurry mode” fear rejection and disapproval. Trying to please everyone by rushing to meet “their” needs is the problem. If you must make all your appointments on time or, if you must never be late, you may have an excessive need to please others. Ask yourself, “If I fail to live up to someone’s expectations, what’s the worst that could happen?”

TIMELINESS, NOT TIME-URGENCY

Being on time is necessary for most situations and meetings. However, while it is important to be on time for most appointments, not all require a “do-or-die” attitude. It really is not necessary to rush through traffic, risking life and limb, just to avoid being late. So, take the foot off the gas, take a deep breath and relax. All will be well.
DISAPPOINTMENT SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

Research has shown that those who scored high on the Disappointment (DI) Scale had a greater frequency of physical or emotional difficulties than those who scored low. Individuals who experience a high level of disappointment tend to have more headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties, moist palms, over-perspiration and other physical problems than those scoring low on this scale.

WHAT TO KNOW

Disappointment relates to what you expect from others, from yourself or from life in general. Some disappointment is unavoidable, while at other times it is preventable or, at least, somewhat avoidable. Disappointment that is unavoidable includes events such as a decrease in business revenue through no fault your own, getting laid off because of a decline in business or having good friends being forced to relocate. Very little can be done to prevent these stressors from occurring; they just happen.

Disappointment is a result of thinking negatively of others because they do not meet your expectations. People who score high on this scale have difficulty setting realistic expectations for others and typically resist changing their expectations to be more in-line with reality. Their attitude is: “This is what I expect and nothing else will do.”

Even if you think your expectations are appropriate and realistic, they may not be. For example, you call a friend several times and she does not reciprocate and call you back. You allow yourself to become upset, angry or, possibly, sad. Consequently, you “write her off” as a friend. However, the reality may be quite different. She may want to call but is overworked, out-of-town or simply overwhelmed with her personal life. Perhaps she is not time-oriented and

Forgets or fails to do what she knows she should do, not because she dislikes you, but because of her nature. To reduce your stress, you can either accept her as is, or adjust your thinking to make the relationship work as it is...not how you wish it to be.

All of us experience disappointment to some extent; however, some of us are more prone to feeling disappointed when our expectations are not met by the people around us. Feeling repeatedly disappointed is a result of a pattern of faulty or irrational thinking about the person or situation. If you experience frequent disappointment, evaluate your expectations and, if necessary, you may need to alter or lower them to be more in-line with what is actually possible.
WHAT TO DO

ASK: “IS THE STRESSOR AVOIDABLE?”

If you learn to differentiate between avoidable and unavoidable stressors, you will have greater control over how you respond and, consequently, you will be able to reduce personal discouragement, disappointment and stress. Focus on changing an event that is, indeed, changeable. One way to reduce your disappointment is to create realistic expectations from the beginning. Realize that faulty thinking may be at the heart of your excessive disappointment and work to understand that what you think affects how you feel.

CHANGE EXPECTATIONS

Expectations play the central role in disappointment and the resulting stress. Evaluate what you expect from family, friends, coworkers and volunteers. What do you expect from life, God, your spouse, coworkers or your children? Mentally check to see if your expectations are reasonable and achievable. If not, you may need to change or alter your expectations. However, if your expectations are reasonable, then go with them.

Determine if your disappointment is specific to one person or situation or to most aspects of your life. This will allow you to focus your energies more effectively. Write down specific disappointments or examples of disappointment and look for the cause, not just the symptom of your stress.

Ask someone close to you if they think your expectations are out-of-line with what is reasonable. They may have a better, or at least a different, perspective than you. Listen to what they say. “If the shoe fits,” it is up to you to make the necessary change.

Remember, the only control you have is the control you place on your own thinking, not the attitudes and behaviors of others. We can influence, ask, request, even demand, but ultimately, you control only YOU and no one else.

REDIRECT YOUR THINKING

Your thinking determines your expectations. The good news is that thinking is controllable. Keep in mind that while you have some control over your thoughts, you have no control over the thoughts or action of others.

Direct your thoughts away from the concern you have with the people who are not meeting your hopes and desires. If someone consistently cannot or will not give you what you want, you have some choices: i.e., accept the person as he or she is at this moment or choose to limit your time with them or dependency on them. Make this kind of decision with care.
COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY

When you think about it, you have little or no control over the actions of others. You can, however, have some influence over people through good and clear communication. You will have better success in getting people to change or do what you desire by employing better communication and effective listening techniques.

STOP DWELLING!

Dwelling on a disappointment is “mental obsession.” It does not change a person or what they may have done or not done. Being preoccupied with a person who does not meet your needs creates unnecessary stress. When you catch yourself thinking excessively about a recent disappointment, redirect and focus back on letting go and accepting that person for who they are. Being “in the moment” is the key to nurturing a positive view of the situation and that will help you feel better. The first step to thinking clearly is to lower your stress levels. Anxiety and fear interferes with rational thinking. Do some deep breathing, take a slow relaxed walk, sit back and focus on the moment... then begin to redirect your thoughts.

LEARN TO LISTEN BETTER

Listen actively and listen more to what others are really trying to communicate. By understanding the person, your expectations become more realistic and achievable. You will also feel much better and reduce your stress response. Plus, you may see some changes in his or her behavior and attitude.

One of the most effective communication tools involves stating what you want from someone and then asking that person to restate what you said to see if they understood you. Simply asking for the person to restate what you said will ensure that your message got through. They may choose to ignore or not do what you ask, but at least they know exactly what you want and expect.

In turn, you can use the same technique when someone expresses their desires and expectations of you. Start with: “If I understand you correctly, what you are saying is...” This is a simple but powerful tool. Ultimately, you can reduce or eliminate disappointment through better clarification of what is being said and heard.
BURNOUT SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

Frequent periods of negative moods are a clear stress warning sign. Individuals who scored high on the Burnout (BR) Scale are likely to experience greater stress than those who scored low. If you scored medium to high on this scale, evaluate what you are thinking and what is the source of how you feel. Is your thinking positive or negative? Do you frequently think about the worst of situations, people or yourself? Are your thoughts mostly negative and do you feel down? The key to feeling better is to make changes in how you view yourself and the world around you. Keep in mind that Burnout is not the same as depression or, even, manic-depression. These are clinical conditions that require competent professional attention from a psychologist or mental health professional.

WHAT TO KNOW

People whose life is filled with both major life changes and a large amount of daily hassles often become “burned-out” and discouraged. Some burnout is normal. Most of us experience it. When burnout occurs frequently or with intensity, focus on finding ways to reverse the negative thinking which generates and maintains these moods.

Periods of negative mood or feeling burnout may be an indication that stress is having an effect on your body, mind and quality of your life. Recent research has shown that individuals experiencing burnout experience changes in the frequency and amount of stress hormones, such as cortisol, in their bodies. These hormones can produce feelings of being down and “lifeless”. The more you feel this way, the greater the stress.

As with most stress “coping” mechanisms, burnout is the result of prolonged periods of hassles and major life events that lead to increasingly negative thoughts and perceptions about oneself and the world in general. Frequent occurrences of negative mood indicate that stress is affecting you detrimentally. You may be experiencing personal burnout. You may also be trying to communicate with others in an indirect way that you are unhappy with yourself, them or life in general. Showing the world how bad you feel may be a plea for help. Unfortunately, those around you may not be able to interpret your moods, nor know what to do to help you or the situation.

Some negative mood may not be avoidable. Occasional “down” times may have a cleansing effect, for example, after being rejected for a new position, you feel hurt and “blue”. This is a normal reaction to your “perceived” failure. As you work through those moments, you will realize that there are things you can do to improve the situation such as: move, apply for another position, or simply talk to key people in your organization about what you can do to improve your skills and eligibility for advancement or change. Your mood lifts and you feel more in control.
Burnout is often the result of irrational thinking. A common irrational thought is to focus on the negative and not see the positive in life. For example, your spouse does not tell you he/she loves you. You interpret this as “he/she doesn’t love me anymore”. You may discover that with some rational thinking you too have stopped saying, “I love you”—not because you do not love them, but because perhaps you have been too preoccupied and worn-out from work. You realize that love is there, but you and your spouse are just not saying what is in your hearts.

One cause of burnout is the negative self-talk called stinkin’ thinkin’. If you do not change the thoughts that are causing you to feel bad, angry or sad, those negative feelings and emotions will perpetuate. Changing thoughts can change feelings in most cases.

**WHAT TO DO**

**KNOW WHERE FEELINGS COME FROM**

Feelings usually follow, not precede, thinking. It is through our thoughts and mental images that anxiety, sadness and anger appear. It is a fallacy that you must first feel good before you can do something. There are many things you can do. For example, imagine a very positive time in your life when you felt great. If you really visualize it, you will feel some of the warm and good feelings of that time. Focus your thoughts and visualizations on good experiences and feelings will change. It is a fact: “Negative thinking produces negative feelings; positive thinking produces positive feelings.”

Ultimately, you have more control over your feelings than you may think. To do so will require focusing on changing any faulty, negative or distorted thinking patterns. There are exceptions. Feelings can come from physiological imbalances from too much alcohol or other drugs. Hormonal changes and imbalances can also be a factor for both men and women. Major depression may be the result of inherited neurological imbalances. If a feeling has a physiological basis, changing thinking will help, but may not be able to override the chemical basis of the problem. You may want to check with a medical professional to see if depression is caused by medical problems.

**IS IT “CLINICAL” DEPRESSION?**

Depression and negative moods are closely linked but are not the same. If you think you are chronically depressed, have no energy or desire to make changes in your life and not just experiencing the normal ups and downs of everyday living, seek professional help—immediately. If you have a work Employee Assistance Program (EAP), call them today. If not, seek out professional assistance from a psychologist or mental health professional.

Irrational thinking is at the heart of feeling down or blue. For example, you may think to yourself: “I am a failure in business”, but in reality you may actually be a success in other areas of your life. You choose not to see the good in you or your actions. You may think, “I never do anything right”. Or, “No one could love someone like me”. Do a reality check. Ask: “Are my assumptions correct?” If not, it may be time to change what you are thinking. This is called “Refuting Irrational Thoughts” and it is at the core of becoming more stress resilient.
Definition: Assume – The lowest form of knowledge. When you make decisions or plan responses based on assumptions you are using the lowest form of knowledge at your disposal. The reality is, you don’t know. So, avoid reactions based on assumptions until you have the facts.

There are many types of irrational thoughts that should be challenged and, if necessary, changed to improve your stress levels. Here are a few of the more common ones:

• EXTREMIST THINKING

You view everything as all bad or all good. Most situations are a mix of good and bad. Someone makes a mistake and you think the world has come to an end.

• STOMPING ON THE POSITIVE

You choose not to see the good in a situation. Like a wet blanket on a fire, you stomp on anything positive. A positive comment is made about someone you do not like and you “jump” all over the person.

• DWELLING ON THE NEGATIVE

You filter in only the negative aspects of life. By becoming obsessed with the negative, you make yourself a slave to your thinking. You may be obsessed with mostly the bad experiences in your life and not the good.

• ESP THINKING

You think you know how others feel and think about you, or, even worse, you expect others to know what you think or feel.

• OVER-GENERALIZING

A few bad things happen. Consequently, you think everything is going to fall apart. Recognize the error of over-generalization and tell yourself that everything will not fall apart just because a few bad or difficult things have happened. Success usually follows failure.

Changing self-talk and “refuting” those irrational thoughts when they occur is challenging for many of us. Through years of learning, we have become programmed to think about and view people in often unproductive ways. This “internal chatter” can bring you down. So, when you are feeling burned-out and everything is not too rosy, start by challenging what you are thinking. If you cannot change what you think at the moment, change what you are doing; do something new or different like taking a walk, riding a bike, go to the movies, visit a friend, read a book—do something you enjoy. Of course, if your sadness is becoming overwhelming, seek professional help as soon as possible.
UNDERACHIEVEMENT SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

Those who score high on the Underachievement (UA) Scale believe that they are living unproductive or unsuccessful lives. Underachievers think this way even when there is objective proof that they are in fact achieving much in their lives. People who feel they are unproductive tend to feel dissatisfied, and that can result in a variety of physical and emotional problems. Ironically, both the quality and quantity of their work, not to mention other areas of their lives, can be negatively affected. If you scored high on the Underachievement Scale, learn more about how to mobilize yourself in positive and productive directions.

Like all stress warning signs, the perception of underachievement may be the result of faulty self-perceptions. These self-perceptions can be quite negative, such as when one has been told repeatedly that he or she is a worthless underachiever by family or friends. Ironically, even a highly productive person can perceive and believe that they are an underachiever. Learning to have a rational view of your life and personal productivity will help you conquer the perception of underachievement. It is also helpful to not “buy-in” to what others have told you over the years and to set realistic goals.

WHAT TO KNOW

The perception of underachievement is at the core of self-disappointment. While excessive disappointment is largely related to disappointment with other people, underachievement is related to disappointment with ourselves and what we view as our shortcomings and mistakes.

Underachievers perceive they are failing to accomplish what they set out to do with their lives. They feel frustrated that they are not accomplishing what they had expected or, they may feel, they are not achieving their goals fast enough. For example, a highly “successful” insurance person, who reached all her goals and was the most successful person in her agency, perceived that she was an underachiever. This happened because she had set herself up for failure with goals and expectations that were not realistic. Her expectations for herself were extremely unrealistic and too high. Changing them made a difference in her stress levels and how she felt about herself.

The perception of any underachievement is directly related to your perception of what you think you can and should be achieving. Any negative self-talk as to why you are not achieving what you want from yourself should be changed to become more positive and self-assuring.
WHAT TO DO

Many of the concepts and ideas expressed in the Disappointment Scale section apply to those who are chronically feeling that they are underachieving. These concepts are not repeated here. (Review “What to Know” and “What To Do” in the Disappointment Scale section).

FACT OR FANTASY?

The view that one is underachieving is directly related to the goals and expectations set and the degree to which one is meeting those expectations. If you set unrealistic goals for yourself, such as “I’ll be a millionaire by 30”, then you will most likely feel like an underachiever.

There are several things you can do to ensure that you do not feel like an underachiever or failure. First, determine if there is a sound and rational basis for your underachievement. You may be correct that you have the capability and skill to achieve more. You may have a patent or invention that will indeed make millions for you. However, if you do not have an immediate way to reach your goal, then consider modifying your expectations to a more realistic time frame.

Second, take stock of what you are doing with your life at home and work and look for those things that you are actually accomplishing. You may be disregarding positive achievements and only looking at the negative.

At home, for example, you have a very loving family and you are always there for your children or spouse. At work, recognize what you have done for your department, your customers or yourself over the past year and acknowledge that you are in fact doing many things very well.

Third, take a broader look at life and do not overgeneralize when things do not go as expected. If you only occasionally fail to meet your own expectations, then look more closely at other areas of your life to reassure yourself.

Last, if you frequently fail to meet your expectations, ask yourself, “Did I really miss the mark? Did I truly fail at what I set out to do?” Take a different perspective. Perhaps there are other ways to measure success. Avoid thinking of success as all or nothing. Consider that satisfaction in life comes from a quest for constant improvement and not the actual achievement of a single goal.

Achieving a goal is good, but you will always look back at the process of reaching that goal as the most satisfying part—the quest! People fail every day. Most people come very close to succeeding and miss the “mark” by only a little. Only underachievers interpret this as failure.
BECOME A BETTER PLANNER

Once you have a clear goal in mind, remember that underachievement often results from poor planning, inadequate organization, and other “controllable” factors. Learn how to take action to improve your skills and behavior in these critical areas. Seek assistance from those who know how to plan, organize and follow through with plans. Attend workshops and seminars, read books or listen to audio recordings on being more productive and organized. Learn better time management skills. Better organize yourself, your office, or your home.

DEVELOP NEW SKILLS

If you are not accomplishing what you want in life, both at home and work, evaluate your skills to see if you need more training or skill building. Many people fail because they lack the necessary skills to foster success. Always keep on learning.

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Stephen Covey, in his book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (see Resources at the end of this booklet) points out to “Begin with the end in mind,” as one of the key habits. Not reaching our goals is often a result of a lack of a clear view of what you want to accomplish.

BE POSITIVE

Mild or severe depression can also cause one to underachieve. If you are depressed and this is indeed affecting your life and work, seek professional help. Review the section on Burnout. Ultimately, to feel better you will need to change your thinking about some aspects of your life.

Evaluate your situation very carefully. If your underachievement is a fallacy and you really are accomplishing much, ask yourself, “Am I setting myself up for failure by not evaluating my goals correctly?” If unrealistic expectations result in the perception of underachievement, scale down or modify what you expect. Work to develop more realistic expectations in future situations. Setting unrealistically high expectations for yourself guarantees you will feel disappointed. Such thinking often lowers self-esteem and increases stress.

The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.”
William James
TENSION SCALE (TE)

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

A high score on the Tension Scale (TE) indicates a high level of physical and emotional tension in your body. Those who score high on this scale rarely take time to relax and release inner tension. As a result, highly tense people do not enjoy good physical and emotional health. If you scored medium to high on this scale, you probably have more stress and discomfort than others who score low. Begin to create more time to relax and you will counteract the negative effect of stress.

Under prolonged tension, the body begins to produce a change in all of your body systems including: muscles, endocrine, digestive, cardiovascular and other bodily systems. One common complaint from too much tension and stress is pain. Pain is often the result of prolonged tension in one or more areas of the body. For example, headaches are very common these days and are usually the result of muscles being unknowingly constricted for hours.

WHAT TO KNOW

Many physical problems are associated with chronic tension; one is chronic fatigue. Chronic fatigue is produced from both the physical and mental tension within us. Some people are so fatigued that they can barely work. Yet, they push on...only to make matters worse.

Not taking time to “relax” is an important indicator of stress. Some people think that just relaxing in front of a TV set is the way to go. While this form of relaxation is okay, it does not accomplish the goal of bringing down body tension.

Deep relaxation is the process of allowing the body to let go and reduce inner physical and emotional tension. It is a conscious act of mentally “letting go” accompanied by intentionally focusing on something positive that lifts our spirit and builds hope. Ask yourself, “What is the value you place on taking time for yourself?” This will determine if you will become a relaxed person in a tense world.

Very tense individuals experience the consequences of prolonged stress in muscle tension, physical pain and fatigue. These individuals tend to also have a higher than normal rate of errors and mistakes at work or in their daily lives. When the body is tense, one does not see, hear or, even, process ideas very well. Consequently, more errors are produced than would normally be expected.

For example, employees who work for long hours at a computer without interruption experience increase muscle tension and fatigue. Many workers who do repetitive work develop a host of physical aches and pains that can result in errors, mistakes and, ultimately, lower productivity. However, those individuals who take time to bring down tension through periodic breaks, deep relaxation exercises and meditation function better and become more productive.
On the emotional side, overly tense people often feel incredibly guilty about taking it easy and being good to themselves and their bodies. They rarely take lunch breaks, read books or take walks. When they do, they feel guilty. The core cause of this behavior is a value system which says, “The only thing good... is to work! Play and relaxation is sinful.” This error in thinking does little to foster good stress resilience or Stressmastery. In general, not taking time to relax can result in:

- Mental burnout
- Increased errors
- Poor decision-making
- Head, neck & back pain
- Reduced physical energy
- Reduced quality of work
- Difficulty concentrating
- Avoidance of others

**WHAT TO DO**

Are you giving too much to others and not enough for yourself? Do you want to take time for yourself, but just cannot seem to make it happen? Do you really believe that if you stop work to relax for 10-15 minutes, the job will never get done? Many people believe that taking time to do relaxation exercises, for example, is a waste of time. Not so. Research shows that taking relaxation breaks actually improves performance.

If you do something good for yourself, refuse to feel guilty about it. JUST DO IT! When people feel guilty about taking time for themselves and doing something they enjoy, they often stop doing it. Then, resentment sets in and the potential benefits are lost. Do not live your life through other people’s standards and expectations. Set your own standard and change the mental tape that says, “It’s wrong to take care of yourself or it’s a sin to focus on yourself.”

Take control of any guilt-producing thoughts and tell yourself that “it is okay and good for you to take time for yourself and enjoy life.” Focus on the benefits to you and your family when you are more relaxed and energized.

**GO TO LUNCH AND DO NOT RUSH**

Take a long and relaxed lunch break several times a week. Do not do business. Take a friend with you and enjoy good conversation. Volunteer your time for a good cause. Read a novel over a cup of tea. Go to a museum. Sit quietly by a stream, in a park or in your own car where no one can reach you. By the way, eat slowly.

**WALK EVERY DAY!**

Walk by yourself or with a friend. Talk not about problems, but possibilities. Walking 30 minutes a day will reduce stress and tension and improve your health! When you walk, look around you and notice the world before you. Look at the trees, flowers, people and children and, yes, stop and smell the roses.
LISTEN TO RELAXATION AUDIOS

Relaxation audios are an excellent way to learn how to let go and relax. To develop the skill of deep relaxation takes time and, yes, dedication. But, the end result will be less stress and the body will cleanse itself of damaging stress hormones and chemicals.

EXERCISE MORE

Exercise is a great way to bring down tension and reduce stress. It takes up to 24 hours for the body to purge stress hormones from the body, but with exercise those hormones are gone in just a few hours. Join an aerobics class, go to the gym, play tennis, ride a bike, hike on weekends, go to a fitness center or jog with friends. You will feel better.

DECOMPRESS

Scuba divers who spend long periods of time at significant depths have to incorporate decompression stops into their dive several times before returning to the surface. This is due to the stress placed on their bodies from the pressure of the water. The pressure of the atmosphere on our bodies at the surface (14.7 psi) increases by one atmosphere of pressure for every 30 feet you go below the surface. Because divers breathe compressed air, nitrogen builds up in the body and if they ascend too quickly would cause it to be forced out of the body rapidly, resulting in bubbles in the bloodstream which can be fatal. On their ascent they may have extra oxygen tanks attached to their ascension line in order to spend the amount of time required at each decompression point for the nitrogen to slowly dissipate. This process allows their body to adjust to the decreasing pressure providing a safe ascent.

In a similar manner we can apply this model to the stress you are experiencing. Build decompression stops into your schedule, between meetings or appointments, and after prolonged periods of increased pressure, which may require longer periods of rest time. Do not try to live with the increased pressure of stress for long periods of time and not build decompression stops into your schedule.

LISTEN TO RELAXING MUSIC

Music is an excellent way to reduce stress. Many forms of music can help you to let go and relax. Everyone has a music preference and is different. Generally you want to listen to music that is soothing and calm. Some classical, contemporary and New Age music are particularly helpful for reducing stress.
The Relaxation Response is a quick and easy way to counteract the Stress Response, or as it is commonly known, the “fight or flight” response. Dr. Herbert Benson coined the term Relaxation Response in his book by the same name as a way to combat the Fight or Flight Response.

**HOW TO ENGAGE THE RELAXATION RESPONSE**

Step 1. Sit quietly, feet on the floor and hands and shoulders relaxed. Turn off your phone and shut the door. Take several deep breaths filling the upper and lower cavity of the lungs. This brings more oxygen to the brain.

Step 2. With eyes closed or open, breathe through your nose and hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds. Let out the air from your lungs slowly through your mouth. Imagine exhaling through a straw. Be aware of your breath and continue slow, deep breathing for 10 to 20 minutes.

Step 3. Keep your mind as passive as possible and when thoughts intrude, accept them and then turn your attention back to your breathing. You may use a word, like One, or Om, or focus on a point in the room.

Step 4. Practice several times a day and you will learn to “engage” the Relaxation Response whenever needed.
II: STRESS EFFECTS SCALES

The result of prolonged stress can be chronic physical and emotional dis-stress. Since the effects of stress are the main indicators of how well you are mastering stress, these are important concepts for you to understand. If you scored high on either or both of these scales, it will be important to learn new and better ways to bring down your stress levels each day. Keep in mind that these scales provide an insight to the degree that stress may be affecting you.

How did you do on the SMQ? Place an (X) in the space below that corresponds to your score on the following SMQ Scales. The two scales that make up the Stress Effects Scales are:

- Physical Effects (PE)
- Life/Work Satisfaction (L/W)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium-Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Medium-High</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENTS/NOTES:
How is stress affecting you?
PHYSICAL STRESS EFFECTS SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL _____________

The Physical Stress Effects Scale assesses the possible effect of intense or prolonged stress on the body. Research has shown that individuals scoring medium to high on one or more of the Seven Stress Warning Sign Scales (see previous section) also have a tendency to score high on this scale. The PE Scale is like a compass that points to how stress may be having a detrimental effect on you. For people who score high, look to see if stress may be having an impact on your current health or emotional condition. If you are in distress, it is important to see a physician or mental health professional. Seek help if you have any questions or concerns about your health, physical problems or symptoms if they are of concern to you.

If you scored medium to high on this scale or if you feel that you are experiencing frequent headaches, stomach problems, or neck and back pains, begin the process of developing the Stressmastery skills suggested under the previous section called Seven Stress Warning Signs.

If you scored low on this scale, you are doing great. However, if at any time you begin to see an increase in physical problems consider that stress may be playing a role in those problems. Perhaps you are experiencing more stressors than usual (see the following section). An increase in stressors, both major Life Events and Hassles, may be a time to be on guard.

WHAT TO KNOW

So, you’re under stress. What happens to your body? The Stress Response, or Fight or Flight Response, is a well researched and medically accepted concept. Yet, while the neurochemistry of the stress response is clearly known, what is not known exactly how the various hormones affect one another and interact on the body’s various organs and systems. What we do know is that these hormones play an important part in our lives.

In response to a perceived stressor, the stress response is energized and engaged. Neurons in the hypothalamus portion of the brain trigger a secretion of two key hormones
(corticotrophin and arginine-vasopressin) which then affect a neuroendocrine response producing epinephrine. Epinephrine creates a “global warning system” that turns on the production of ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormones) from the pituitary gland. ACTH charges up the adrenal cortex where cortisol and other glucocorticoids are then dumped into the bloodstream. These hormones are part of the “flight or fight” response that affects all systems of the body including: cardiovascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal, renal and endocrine changes.

The Stress Response, once engaged, can now be observed and, indirectly, experienced by others. The SMQ provides a clear view how stress is affecting not only your body but, also, your daily behavior, attitudes and thoughts.

**GAS - GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME**

Another way to look at the Stress Response is the **General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)** that was created by Hans Selye, the father of modern stress theory. Through extensive research, Selye discovered that under stress the body reacts in three phases. The GAS and consists of the following:

**PHASE ONE:** The **ALARM REACTION**. During this phase the body prepares itself to defend against the stressor (physical or emotional).

**PHASE TWO:** The body moves into an active **RESISTANCE PHASE** where it fights to keep the body in balance. This can be a long, protracted phase often covering months or years in chronic stress situations.

**PHASE THREE:** If the stressors don’t go away, the individual does not stow dwelling on a problem, or the person does not learn positive stress management techniques, the **EXHAUSTION PHASE** can set in and the body may begin to break down. In the most severe case, chronic illnesses and early death can occur.

**WHAT TO DO**

The goal in learning to become more stress resilient and to master stress on a daily basis is to pay attention to the body and the many ways that stress can affect us. All the techniques and approaches to mastering stress presented in the previous sections will help you to bring down stress and enable you to become more resilient when stress becomes...Dis-stress.
LIFE/WORK SATISFACTION SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

The Life/Work Satisfaction Scale assesses emotional satisfaction with different aspects of your work and personal life. As with the PE Scale, this scale offers a glimpse of the consequences of stress on feelings and emotions and measures the level of happiness with key aspects of your life.

High levels of dissatisfaction in one area can result in unhappiness in other areas. A person who is dissatisfied with his or her career choice can easily bring that dissatisfaction into their home life. When one is dissatisfied, they may show it through anger or, possibly, depression. Likewise, a person experiencing dissatisfaction and unhappiness with their family life can see an impact on their quality or quantity of work. In addition, their relationship with coworkers can also be negatively affected.

WHAT TO KNOW

The Life/Work Satisfaction Scale measures the effect of stress on personal and job/work happiness. This scale can guide you toward those areas where a personal change can improve the quality of your life at work or at home. Only you can make the changes. If you scored medium to high on this scale, you are clearly dissatisfied with one or more areas of your life. This is a stress warning sign. If you have been experiencing high levels of dissatisfaction for some time, take a closer look at the causes of your dissatisfaction. Pay special attention to the Disappointment, Burnout, and Underachievement Scales of the Seven Stress Warning Signs.

WHAT TO DO

Understand that the Stress Response is both a “friend” and “foe.” The impact of the Stress Response can help you to be creative and productive or, if it continues unabated, it can negatively affect you physically and emotionally. (A description of the Stress Response is found at the end of the next section.)

Since the Physical Stress Effects and Life/Work Satisfaction Scales are a reflection of your level of stress, one key to reducing the negative impact is to learn the Relaxation Response. (A description of the Relaxation Response is found at the end of the next section.) Also, review the “WHAT TO DO” sections of each of the Seven Stress Warning Signs areas for the knowledge and skills that will increase your Stressmastery abilities. Learning how to reduce tension, stress and anxiety is ultimately up to you.
III. STRESSORS SCALES

How did you do in this area? Place a (X) in the spaces below that correspond to your scores on the SMQ for both the Life Events and Hassles scales.

Stressors are events such as earthquakes, death of a loved one, economic problems or people like an angry boss, a mean motorist, or a depressed spouse, friend or loved one. When you perceive events like these to be a threat they are called stressors. In essence, we allow stressors to throw us off balance with the result being....Dis-stress.

The SMQ Stressor Scales evaluate two different types of stressors that can have an impact on how well you feel and function. Learning the difference between these two concepts can make a difference in how well you master stress. The two Stressor scales are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium-Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Medium-High</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live Events (LE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassles (HA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENTS/NOTES:
What are your key stressors and is there anything you can do to change them in a positive way?
The Life Events Scale measures some of the more common major life events as well as daily hassles that can cause the stress response within us. The two types of stressors assessed by the SMQ, Life Events and Hassles, can also be divided into those stressors that are unavoidable and those that can, to some extent, be changed or modified.

If you scored high or medium-high on either the Life Events or the Hassles scales, chances are you are experiencing a higher than normal amount of stressors in your life at this time. If you scored medium to low, you probably are not experiencing much distress at this time. However, some life events alone can be so important that it will cause a considerable amount of stress. An example of a major life stressor that could have an overriding impact is the death of a loved one or major loss of financial stability. In these cases, you may score low on both scales, but the fact that they are so important and powerful a stressor might lead to high stress levels. Regardless of your score, evaluate each stressor to determine the best course of action.

WHAT TO KNOW

When you perceive a stressor, whether real or imagined, first determine if the stressor can be changed, stopped or modified. If so, then you may have some influence over the repeat or re-occurrence of that stressor. The majority of Life Events, once they happen, are not changeable.

In general, the Life Events Scale is a good indicator of the amount of unavoidable life stressors that you have experienced during the past 12 months. In addition to the total number of different Life Event stressors experienced, it is important to keep in mind that some major life events can have a stronger or more lasting impact on you than other stressors.

Each person perceives and responds to major Life Events in their own unique way. In general, experiencing a high amount of major Life Events has been shown to be correlated with “future” physical health problems. Due to the uniqueness of each of us and our level of ability to master stressors, it is not always predictable how a person will respond to these stressor events. Sometimes there is an immediate physiological reaction, like getting the common cold, headaches, or experiencing stomach problems. At other times, there is a delay between the onset of multiple negative Life Events and the development of physical problems. The degree to which major life events can affect us is related to our own ability to master stress on a daily basis and our degree of sensitivity.
The evidence is clear that there is a “risk” for physical problems to develop after experiencing a variety of major Life Events during the preceding year. Some examples of major Life Events stressors are...

Death of a loved one  
Divorce or Separation  
Personal injury  
Marriage or Retirement  
Financial loss  
Change of job status  
Legal problems

WHAT TO DO

Few of these stressors are preventable and most cannot be changed, although some, such as financial loss, can be prevented by improving how you handle money, such as saving more or finding ways to increase your income. Once they have occurred, there is no way to change or alter them.

ACCEPT THE STRESSOR

The key to dealing with unavoidable and uncontrollable stressors is to learn to “let go” and accept the reality of the situation. This is easier said than done; yet, as emotions subside, one can gradually move from rejecting and denying the event to the inevitable acceptance.

RE-FRAME

Sometimes major life events need to be Re-Framed or put into a different context so as to give it a new or more effective perspective. For example, the death of a loved one or a major illness can be viewed from multiple perspectives. One person might say, “Why me? What have I done to deserve this? I should have done something to have prevented this.” A re-framing would mean thinking differently such as, “I’m not in control of this situation and there is nothing I can do to change it. I will be strong and positive to help my family and friends weather this storm.”

EMBRACE THE CHALLENGE

People who look at a major Life Event stressor not as a problem but as a challenge, and do much better emotionally and physically. These hardy personalities are the ones who tend to hold up much better. So, mentally challenge yourself to overcome the current difficulties.
The Stress Response is a Choice!
So, too, is the Relaxation Response!
Choose Relaxation over Tension!

HAASSLES SCALE

YOUR RISK LEVEL ________________

The Hassles Scale identifies some of the more common types of daily events that may at first glance seem minor. Hassles are those situations that people experience each and every day. While there are many more hassles than assessed by this scale, these are some of the key stressors you are likely to experience. You can add other types of stressors more pertinent to your job or life as needed.

WHAT TO KNOW

Research has shown that Hassles may be more important in producing a strong stress response than even major Life Events. Hassles, unlike Life Events, tend to be more frequent and can be extremely irritating if experienced on a perpetual basis.

Hassles are those often little but highly irritating events or situations that cause dissatisfaction, frustration and stress. The more irritating you perceive these Hassles to be, the greater the impact on you. Frequent and enduring Hassles in our daily lives can definitely affect your emotional and physical health. Hassles range from car breakdowns and home repairs, to people being late to meet you, or the boss piling on more work.

WHAT TO DO

THE RELAXATION RESPONSE IS A CHOICE

How you react to a stressor, whether that stressor is big or small, frequent or infrequent, is up to you. You can choose to react with anger, frustration and irritability or you can choose to accept the stressor for what it is...just an event in your life that will eventually pass.

You can choose to take a deep breath and let stress go, or you can hang on to the problem and make it worse. Mastering stress is about “letting go” and allowing the body to come back into balance. In medicine this is call Homeostasis. To the average person this means coming back into balance.
STRESS WARNING SIGNS

Below are symptoms people often experience when exposed to stress. The SMQ has helped you to identify the major areas were stress can be revealed. Check any of the areas below to get a summary of your key warning signs. Then “write in” the one or two most troublesome to you.

PHYSICAL SIGNS OF STRESS

___ Back pain
___ Stomach aches
___ Cold hands or feet
___ Easily fatigued
___ Tight neck, shoulders
___ Racing heart
___ Shallow breathing
___ Constipation
List others: ___________________________________________________

What are most troubling to you?
1. ___________________________________
2. ___________________________________

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS OF STRESS

___ Excess smoking
___ Eating without thinking about the food
___ Short-tempered
___ Inability to finish tasks
___ Wake up early
___ Teeth grinding (bruxism)
___ Nail biting
List others: ___________________________________________________

What are most troubling to you?
1. ___________________________________
2. ___________________________________
**EMOTIONAL SIGNS OF STRESS**

___ General anxiety (Not a phobia)  
___ Feeling helpless  
___ Being bored  
___ On edge  
___ Irritable  
___ Feeling lonely  
___ Sense of powerlessness  
___ Crying easily  
___ Overwhelming pressure  
___ Feeling angry inside  
___ Feeling “burned out”  
___ Unhappiness  
___ Depressed  
___ Up and down moods  

List others: ____________________________________________________

**What are most troubling to you?**

1. ___________________________________
2. ___________________________________

**MENTAL (COGNITIVE) SIGNS OF STRESS**

___ Trouble thinking clearly  
___ Difficulty with concentration, focus  
___ Forgetfulness  
___ Lack of creativity  
___ Expecting too much from others  
___ Inability to make decisions  
___ Constant worry  
___ Loss of humor  
___ Being self-critical  
___ Being pessimistic  
___ Loss of focus  
___ Confusion  

List others: ____________________________________________________

**What are most troubling to you?**

1. ___________________________________
2. ___________________________________
WHAT ARE YOUR STRESSORS?

Who or what are the main Hassles, Life Events or frequent stressors in your life? (E.g., people, events or things that happen)

Who or what irritates you the most in your WORK life?

Who or what irritates you the most in your PERSONAL life?

MASTERING STRESS

How do you handle or deal with your stress in a NEGATIVE way?

How do you handle or deal with your stress in a POSITIVE way?

What do you feel emotionally in response to stress?

TAKING CONTROL

Fill in the following spaces to create your own plan of action for dealing with stress. With awareness comes responsibility—by becoming more aware you can make better decisions for yourself, your health, your family and your coworkers.

The stress symptoms I most need to notice and pay attention to are:

My stress triggers include the following (situations and people):

A better way to deal with each of these will be to (list the stress management techniques you will use here):

How will you remember to engage in stress management in the moment, at the onset of feeling stressed?
HOW WILL YOU MASTER YOUR STRESS?
(Check as many as apply, but be reasonable about what you can actually do)

**BODY MASTERY**
Engage the Relaxation Response

___ Breathing exercises
___ Listen to calm and relaxing music
___ Start doing yoga
___ Exercise
___ Take a needed vacation
___ Get more sleep
___ Eat healthy foods
___ Drop some pounds
___ Progressive relaxation
___ Listen to relaxation audios
___ Practice Tai Chi
___ Re-energize–take a break and relax
___ Take a nap
___ Get a massage
___ Reduce alcohol consumption
___ Take a hot bath

**MENTAL MASTERY**
Change What & How You Think

___ Refute irrational thoughts
___ Meditate
___ Reflect & contemplate in quiet
___ Be grateful for what you have
___ Visualize relaxing scenes
___ Seek professional help
___ Stop dwelling on a past issue
___ Change expectations of others
___ Pray
___ Believe in yourself
___ Accept the person or situation
___ Journal your thoughts
___ Re-think (turn a negative to a positive)
___ Talk out your issues with a good listener
___ Change expectations for yourself
___ Visualize success

**STRESSOR MASTERY**
Control What You Can & Let Go of What You Cannot

___ Avoid stress-provoking people
___ Reduce your “task list”
___ Set achievable goals
___ Start tasks that you are avoiding
___ Accept stressors out of your control
___ Plan better
___ Learn better communication skills
___ Get organized
___ Avoid situations that cause stress
___ Spend time with a good friend
___ Practice better time management
___ Laugh more; Read funny books; Watch comedies
___ Re-focus when an unexpected stressor happens
___ Learn some new skills
___ Listen before talking
___ Say “No” and mean it
This is your personal commitment to making a positive change toward Stressmastery. Review the Stress Warning Signs section and select ONE area to work on. By completing this contract you are agreeing that this area is in need of change and that you will do something about it.

**STEP 1: SELECT THE RISK AREA TO WORK ON** - If you scored HIGH or MEDIUM on any of the Seven Stress Warning Sign Scales, it is recommended that you focus on the one area of greatest concern to you at this time. Other areas can be worked on, but it is better to make small changes in a critical area than to attempt to do too many things. The key to effective change is to get some initial positive results. Stressmastery is a lifelong process for all of us. Be patient. Work hard. Results will follow.

**STEP 2: IDENTIFY WHAT YOU WILL CHANGE** - Following are the behaviors, thoughts, or attitudes that I will change (be positive):
1. 
2. 
3. 

**STEP 3: WHAT WILL PREVENT YOU FROM BEING SUCCESSFUL?** - Some barriers are: other people, things, attitudes, lack of knowledge, lack of commitment, etc.:
1. 
2. 
3. 

**STEP 4: I WILL DO THE FOLLOWING TO OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS**:
1. 
2. 
3. 

**STEP 5: ASSESS YOUR COMMITMENT**:
My level of commitment to change is (circle one): HIGH MED LOW

**STEP 6: TIME ALLOCATION**:
I will allow myself _____ months to achieve a reasonable level of success.

**STEP 7: COMMITMENT TO CHANGE**:
I COMMIT to accomplish this goal! Sign: ________________________________

**STEP 8: BE ACCOUNTABLE**. I will give permission to ____________________________ to help hold me accountable for this change.

**IMPORTANT**:
Copy and share this contract with another person as soon as possible. Post on your refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or office wall! Let others help you to be accountable for your change.

Remember, a secret goal is rarely achieved.
**CHOICES: ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING**

John is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, “If I were any better, I would be twins!”

He was a natural motivator.

If an employee was having a bad day, John was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up and said to him, “I don’t get it! You can’t be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?”

He replied, “Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or ... you can choose to be in a bad mood.

I choose to be in a good mood.

Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or... I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it.

Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or... I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life.”

“Yeah, right, it’s not that easy,” I protested.

“Yes, it is,” he replied. “Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation presents choices. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect your mood.

You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It’s your choice how you live your life.”

I reflected on what he said. Soon thereafter, I left the Tower Industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it.
Several years later, I heard that he was involved in a serious accident, falling some 60 feet from a communications tower.

After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, he was released from the hospital with rods placed in his back.

I saw him about six months after the accident.

When I asked him how he was, he replied, “If I were any better, I’d be twins. Wanna see my scars?”

I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place.

“The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon-to-be born daughter,” he replied. “Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live or...I could choose to die. I chose to live.”

“Weren’t you scared? Did you lose consciousness?” I asked.

He continued, “The paramedics were great.

They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read ‘he’s a dead man’. I knew I needed to take action.”

“What did you do?” I asked.

“Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me,” said John. “She asked if I was allergic to anything. ‘Yes’, I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, ‘Gravity.’

Over their laughter, I told them, ‘I am choosing to live.’
Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.’ ”

He lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude... I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully.

**Attitude, after all, is everything!**

Author Unknown
The Stress Response is a choice. So, too, is the Relaxation Response! Choose the Relaxation Response...it works to bring your body, mind and spirit back into balance.

Life is a journey over which you have some control...even if you choose to do nothing to improve your life and reduce your stress, you have made that choice.

Stressmastery begins with changing your thinking, expectations and perceptions...not by trying to change the people and events around you.

Determine what you can and cannot change. Take action to affect a change when a change is possible. If the stressor cannot be changed--change your thinking about the stressor and “let it go”.

Recognize that your actions and words can be the source of incredible stress to others and yourself! Use the power of positive words and an upbeat attitude to affect a change in your world.

Fear and anxiety are at the root of many stress problems. Flow with fear of rejection, failure or not being in control. Fear is simply a function of how you perceive the threats of the world, even when the threat is only being a few minutes late. Flow and “let go”!

Keep expectations realistic. Nothing gets a person into trouble faster than expecting something that cannot or will not happen. If it is not going to happen, change or lower your expectations. That is the choice.

Use the resources available when you believe you have a problem. Work at problem solving, not playing the blame game. Seeking sympathy for your misfortunes will not change your misfortunes and will only hinder your movement toward Stressmastery. If you are chronically depressed, seek out an appropriate doctor to see if your depression is influenced by stress or perhaps some chemical imbalance in your body.

Avoid over-using chemical substances to control your anxious and stressful feelings. Exercise, yoga, deep breathing, relaxation techniques, making love, giving or receiving a massage, walking, or listening to music are far better at producing serenity and calm than any chemical. Plus, you remain in control of your life.
For additional assistance on your road to Stressmastery, consider one or more of the following:

**If in a Crisis Call...**

- 911
- A friend, spouse, minister or rabbi
- Your physician or mental health professional

**If not in a crisis, but for rapid help contact one or more of the following:**

- EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
- Information and Referral Service in your community
- Local or State Psychological Association Information and Referral
- Local or State Social Worker's Association Information and Referral
- Your physician, hospital or clinic
- A psychologist, psychiatrist, marriage and family counselor or social worker
- A clergy member

**World Wide Web**

- [www.Stressmaster.com](http://www.Stressmaster.com)
- [www.nimh.gov](http://www.nimh.gov) National Institute of Mental Health
- [www.medscape.com](http://www.medscape.com) You may need to create a login I.D.
- [www.healthcentral.com](http://www.healthcentral.com) Good general health and mental health topics
- [www.intelihealth.com](http://www.intelihealth.com) The John Hopkins Medical Newsletter

**RESOURCES**

Covey, S. (1990) The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Franklin Covey Co