

6 Ways to Just Say No to Stress

Guest post from Janelle Bruland:

There is a growing epidemic that is killing us as leaders, and it's completely curable. Our culture is filled with more anxiety and stress than ever. None of us were built to handle what we are all dealing with on a daily basis. The average knowledge worker today is interrupted every 11 minutes by some form of communication. Many of us wake in the morning and immediately reach for our phones which we strategically placed on our bedside table the night before so that it will be the first thing we see each day. The people in our lives expect an answer to their messages in seconds, and they think we are ignoring them if we take even a few minutes more than that.

The result of all of this is chaos and chaos creates stress. Stress is a killer. It effects our health, causes confusion, and steals our joy. If it goes on long enough it might steal our time here on this planet and that would be even more tragic.

So, what can we do? My guess is that if you are reading this you have probably been overwhelmed recently. In fact, many of you live in a constant overwhelmed state.

I have learned firsthand that living this way is not sustainable. I have a successful business that I started in 1995. In a time of exponential growth and expansion, my husband got in the car and drove away leaving me with three young children to raise. If there was such a thing as a stress meter, I would have been afraid to know what the numbers were at the time. How in the world was I going to continue to lead my company and keep up with my duties at home (and anywhere else, for that matter)?

Sometimes challenges like these turn out to be a blessing because it forces us to figure out how to change things. I did just that. My heart was broken but there was no time to grieve. I had to get to work on a solution. I didn't always do it perfectly, but I did discover transformational systems and practices that not only allowed me to survive, but to thrive in the most stressful time of my life.

I would like to share a few of them with you:

1. Write a list of things you are going to say no to. That's right. Not a to-do list, but a not-going-to-do list. For example, I say no to the opportunities that come up that I am not completely passionate about. When we choose to participate in something, we should be excited to be involved, not doing it out of guilt or obligation. I also say no to things that are not aligned with my core values and priorities. To stay true to our values, our words, behavior, and actions must be in line with our beliefs. I decline requests that are not in my wheelhouse. Often, we are asked to do things that truly belong on someone else's "to do" list. Be sure to pass on those, or delegate them to a more appropriate person.

I have learned to avoid those things that drain me of energy as often as I can. Our time should be spent on activities that we enjoy and give us energy, not deplete it. And finally, I say no to relationships that are unhealthy. We will never be our best if we are constantly having to lift ourselves up from interactions with unsupportive or negative people. Eliminate these relationships.

2. Cut back on technology. I know. Easy to say. Hard to do. We are all afraid we might miss something, right? But it will be there when you come back to it. It's not going anywhere. This is a tough one, but doable. At first you will literally have a physical reaction to leaving your cell phone behind or turning it off. But keep doing it and eventually you will experience the freedom that it brings to be unhooked and you will want to do it more often.

3. Train the people in your circle about how and when you will be responding. If you have just walked into the gym and get a call that you know is not a life or death matter, let it go to voice mail and don't feel guilty. Schedule a time in your day for phone calls and email. Pretty soon, people will know that you are not ignoring them. Do this one thing and you will begin to live a proactive life instead of a reactive one.

4. Take care of your health. We are no good to anyone else if we don't take care of ourselves first. Commit to self-care. Fuel your body with healthy food. Find an hour a day to walk or go to the gym. Most of us are too sedentary. We work at desk jobs. Get moving. Schedule it and then don't let anything keep you from it. Exercise releases endorphins that give us euphoria and joy. Endorphins are stress killers!

5. Be grateful. Most of us live better than 90 percent of the world. Our complaints are usually, as one person said, "First world problems." You will drive to work today in a decent car. You most likely live in a safe and warm place. Remind yourself often about how good you have it. If something needs to be changed, change it. One practice I use is to write down three things I am grateful for every day. This activity shifts my mindset.

6. Go to sleep. If you do all these de-stressing activities you will find that you also start doing perhaps the most important thing to help relieve stress and clear your mind: sleep. Most of us do not get enough sleep and, when we do, we don't sleep well. Sleep is vital to winning the war on stress and having the life we always dreamed of.

These 6 practices were life changing for me. Incorporate them and enjoy the positive effects when you just say no to stress.

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