

The Seven Secrets of a Stress Free Life

By

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Introduction

Stress works like a pressure cooker. When a pressure cooker is filled with water and put on a burner with high heat, the steam builds up inside until finally a valve on the lid is forced open, allowing the steam to escape. This process continues over and over, as the steam builds up again and again and the valve is repeatedly forced open. The secret to getting rid of the steam, however, is not continually re-opening the valve, but simply turning off the burner.

So, what exactly is the burner in your life that causes stress to build up, and how do you turn it off? The answer to this question is the key to permanent stress relief and a life that is whole, complete and fulfilling.

If you have read other stress management books, they often look at external circumstances as the source of stress and give tools to change that environment so the stress is eliminated. Several recommendations from Amazon's top books on stress management include: work less, find a job you love, eat healthier, exercise, meditate, spend time in nature, read positive quotes, learn a new skill, read a book or get a massage. The list can go on *ad infinitum*. The problem with these suggestions is that they are the equivalent of lifting the valve on the lid of the pressure cooker.

My approach is different—and simple. You don't have to *do* anything. You just *think* differently about your circumstances. This is how you turn off the burner.

Stress is created in the mind. And so the solution to stress is also found in the mind. The Seven Secrets in this book are all mind-altering principles. Once these principles are integrated into your thought process, stress will automatically dissolve without any effort on your part. While you won't need to change your circumstances to reduce stress, you will almost certainly *want* to make some changes in your life to bring more happiness, peace, serenity and love. The key is that these changes will happen effortlessly through your new life perspective.

So, what exactly are these Seven Secrets?

1. Identify needs that are really just wants.
2. Disconnect external circumstances from internal feelings.
3. Take total responsibility for everything in your life.
4. Give up being right.
5. Realize we don't know anything for certain.
6. If you must speculate about the future, speculate positively.
7. Love ourselves first, then others.

In the first seven chapters of this book, we will examine each of these secrets in depth. I call them secrets because they fly in the face of conventional wisdom and conflict with the current cultural paradigm that we must work hard to get ahead. They will likely feel counter-intuitive to the way you have been thinking. This is actually a good thing. If the way you've been thinking was working for you, you would already be living stress free and wouldn't need to read this book!

As we begin to explore the Seven Secrets, you may find yourself wanting to disprove these new principles. It is always possible to create some extreme scenario where they don't appear to work. I hope you will set such thoughts aside for now, give yourself a chance to try them out and see if your life becomes less stressful. The more open-minded you are, the easier it will be to apply these principles in your daily life.

Following the Seven Secrets, I list some optional tools that may be helpful as you begin to adopt this new mindset. Remember, these tools are not required for a stress free lifestyle. They are available for when you get stuck in your old way of thinking. Using the tools can help you learn to see your life from a different perspective and effect a paradigm shift in your thinking. When that happens, the same situations will produce a different mental reaction—one that doesn't create any stress.

Finally, I will give some examples of people who used the Seven Secrets to change their lives. Their experiences represent some common scenarios that many people encounter, so they can give you a map to follow.

My hope is that something in this book will trigger that “aha” moment, where things just click and it all starts to become clear and easy to live. As you embrace the Seven Secrets with your heart and mind, you will find yourself living a life of wonder—fantastic, exciting, incredible, unpredictable, spontaneous, successful, whole, complete and fulfilling. That's my life today and I wish the same for you. So, let's get started on your journey to a new way of thinking and living.

Chapter 1: The First Secret

“Identify needs that are really just wants.”

Several years ago, it suddenly dawned on me that my cat Princess did very few things during the day, and yet seemed to lead a remarkably relaxed life, entirely free from stress. Her daily routine consisted of sleeping, walking over to her tray to eat or drink something, going to the litter box, sleeping some more, playing with her cat toys and going outside. When I made this observation, I was suddenly electrified by the realization that we don't actually need many of the things we *think* we need in life, and killing ourselves trying to get them creates a lot of stress. This “aha” moment opened my mind to an entirely new framework of thinking, and the Seven Secrets came to me one by one after that time. So it seems fitting to begin our journey to a stress free life by understanding the difference between wants and needs.

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Unmet needs can create a lot of stress. One way of trying to relieve this stress is working harder to get the things you think you need. Many stress-reduction books follow this method. They promise that if you follow their formula (be it law of attraction, positive thinking, visualization, or something else), you can be super rich, have the most fantastic partner, or be famous, and *then* you won't be stressed anymore. Unfortunately, if you are not able to master the prescribed method, your stress will actually increase because in addition to your perceived needs not being met, you have also failed to accomplish the book or seminar's teachings.

The alternative, which this book espouses, is to realize that many of the things that we think we need are actually just things we want. And, if something is only a want, we can certainly live without it.

My intention here is not to say that having wants and desires is bad. Most of us have many good and wonderful wants that bring us joy, happiness and comfort. What we are talking about here are things we *don't currently have* that we think we must have. When we can accurately differentiate between wants and needs, the stress that comes from an unmet want naturally disappears. When we learn to let go of wants we don't have, amazingly, many of them will come to us without effort.

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The first key to eliminating stress in your life is recognizing the difference between a need and a want. If I asked you to list your core needs of life, your list could be a dozen or more items. Instead, I represent to you that we have only a very small number of true needs—those things that are necessary for physical survival. If those core needs are met, we can be free of stress. If we obtain more than this, it's like a Christmas present.

There are several arguments about what our core survival needs actually are. Some examples include food, water, clothing, shelter, sleep, and sanitation¹. Let's look at these in more detail.

Food and Water. A human being can typically survive a few days without water and weeks without food, though some extreme exceptions exist. (The Guinness World Record for surviving without food or liquids is held by Andreas Mihavecz with 18 days. The longest confirmed hunger strike is Barry Horne with 68 days.) We can all agree that we need food and water to survive for any

¹ There are other core needs such as oxygen, breathing, heart rate and managing body temperature which are necessary to survival. I exempt them here because they are managed by our limbic system as autonomic responses. They need no attention from our conscious mind and so are outside the scope of this book. Additionally, I recognize that some people require serious medical attention for physical survival and this chapter may not reflect their situation. If you consider yourself in this category, please know that I fully support getting medical attention. That is certainly a true need.

prolonged period, but the important question here is what type of food and drink is a need and what is a want. I have spent time in homeless shelters where the nutrition is basic yet sufficient, and tap water works just fine. On the TV show Survivor, they find sustenance in their natural habitat. In the Sikh temples in India, basic meals consisting of bread, lentils, and rice are offered to anyone who wishes to eat, free of charge. The point is that all we really need when it comes to food and water is a basic meal that provides the nutrients for sustaining our bodies, and clean water. We don't need McDonalds or dinner at a 5-star steak restaurant to survive. Those are a want and not a need.

Clothing and Shelter. Depending on where we live, we may need clothing and shelter to physically protect our body from the elements. I spoke with many homeless people in Los Angeles who had been surviving with no permanent shelter for years, but this approach probably wouldn't work in North Dakota during the winter. Although this need is dependent on your local environment, your *environment* can be changed to accommodate this need. Furthermore, even if you require some housing to stay in the city where you want to live, the need for shelter can be met by very basic accommodations. Many people think that they need a fancy house in order to survive, but this simply is not true.

Sleep. The brain needs time to shut down and restore itself. It is well established that sleep is critically important for proper functioning of the human body. So much so, in fact, that sleep deprivation has been used as a torture technique to get information from captured enemy combatants. Unless we are being forcefully prevented from sleeping by such techniques, after a certain amount of time with no sleep we will go unconscious. Although scientists don't agree on the exact reasons why our bodies need sleep, they

do agree that we need sleep to survive. If we don't sleep, we will soon go insane and eventually die.²

All we need to do to meet this need is find a place to sleep. This may be a bed, a mattress on the ground, or just a pile of blankets (in the case of some of my daughter's poor college friends). However, we don't need a \$3,000 bed in order to fulfill this need for our physical survival.

Sanitation. Aside from the occasional blockage that many of us encounter from time to time and can easily manage with over-the-counter supplements, we as human beings have a fully functioning waste management system. The only requirement is to find a way to dispose of the waste in a sanitary manner. In a developed country, most people are fortunate enough that this is not usually difficult to do. Although I have a business associate who swears by his \$6,000 Toto toilet,³ this type of luxury is not a need.

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The intention of the preceding examples is not to present *the* definitive list of every item that is necessary for survival but rather to give you a general idea of a "true need." Some may further argue that certain things are not necessary for physical survival, but are important for emotional or mental sanity, such as human contact. While this may be true, the point of listing some of these basic needs is to get you to ask yourself this important question: Is the thing that is stressing me out really a need, or just a want? Most of the time, it will be a want that you have been tricked into thinking is a need. If you can learn to identify those needs as wants and recognize that you don't really need them, you will find the stress from not having them will be released.

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http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2009/05/can_you_die_from_lack_of_sleep.html

³ <http://www.totousa.com/neorest%C2%AE-700h-dual-flush-toilet-10-08-gpf>

You may be noticing that you have many things in your life beyond your basic survival needs. Is that a problem? Of course not. As long as we obtain our wants comfortably, without stress, we can enjoy a much higher standard of living beyond the bare minimum. There is no rule that says you can't have any wants. Just don't buy into the lie that something you don't have is necessary to give you the positive feeling you are seeking. If something is only a want, we can choose to stop pursuing it if that requires effort and stress.

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Here are some of the arguments I've heard by people trying to prove a want is a need:

Q: I live in L.A. I have to have a car to get around.

A: When I moved back to L.A. in 1990, I could not afford to buy a car. So I took a one hour bus ride to work and back each day. Over the course of a year, I read over 20 books and did a lot of self-exploration. I was caught up in my own human potential movement. At the end of two years, I had to buy a car because my work schedule changed and there were no bus routes that could get me there on time. Suddenly, I found myself inching through bumper to bumper freeway traffic. It was much more stressful and I lost my meditation and study time as well. So was the car now a need? No, I chose to keep my job so my new misery was of my own making. Life can definitely be less stressful in L.A. without a car.

Q [from an avid golfer]: I play golf. I need that to relax.

A: Mark Twain said the game of golf is a good walk spoiled. I've played golf a few times. I didn't see anyone on the course who was relaxing. I did see a lot of hand wringing, cheating when the ball was behind a tree, fudging on the counting of strokes and other general indications of stress. In fact, I seemed to be the only person playing without stress. I shot a 70. That would have been a good score except we only played nine holes. And we capped each hole

at 8 strokes. My fun and my score had no relationship to each other because I live a stress free life.

Q: I can't pay my bills. I need a higher paying job.

A: I sat down with the person who claimed this and showed them how I live financially stress free. My method is simple.

1. Don't use credit cards.
2. Pay cash for everything. If you lack the cash, you don't need it.⁴

He wasn't willing to live that way so I used a spreadsheet to create a simple budget. We went down each category and estimated what he thought he spent per month. We next took his recent bank and credit card statements and put each expense in its category. After adding them up, we compared what he actually spent to his estimate. The difference was substantial. The problem was not a lack of earnings. It was not knowing where the money was going. He was spending money on wants because he thought they were needs.

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Identifying needs that are really just wants frees you from the trap of chasing after things you don't need and getting stressed out when you don't get them. This is the first secret of a stress free life because there will *always* be something you want and don't have.

As you adopt this secret, you will begin to experience a whole new perspective about what is really necessary and important in your life. You will begin to appreciate the things that really matter. Watch how awesome your life will become!

⁴ If you want those credit card points and cash back, then use a card but put that amount of cash in an envelope so you will be able to pay the card off timely each month and avoid interest charges.