



## How Stress Can Fuel Your Evolution

By Dr. Chance T. Eaton

As we shift our focus onto a new year, I find myself reflecting on 2016 and what major lessons and experiences arose. Without a doubt I can say that stress was a definite theme for many of my colleagues, close friends and myself. The world continues to get busier as we work to understand expanding amounts of data and information, strive for greater work efficiencies and adapt to an ever-changing market environment.

I, like most people on this planet, have had my fair share of challenging life situations. Some of them are natural occurrences that arise out of probability, while some are of our own doing. Some are quick but powerful in impact; some are slow but powerful in the accumulating dull ache. The one lesson I can take away from all of my life challenges, self-exploration and study is that stress is a beautiful thing!

If we don't understand what stress is or how to manage it, it can be expensive and dangerous. By definition, stress is the result of an imbalance between our resources (motivators that stimulate growth and development) and stressors (pressures and demands from the external environment). Any time demands or pressures are higher than we are able to manage they begin to take a toll on our systems.

The reason stress is good for us is that it has kept us alive for hundreds of thousands of years. Imagine our ancestors, years ago, living in primitive con-

ditions. Early life contained low levels of complexity, with most attention focused on nutrition and shelter. As with all other earthly life, survival and reproduction was the name of the game. To aid in the survival and reproduction game, during threats and danger, our bodies would switch into a hardwired mode of fight-or-flight. Physiologically, the sympathetic nervous system started a whole cascade of survival activities in the body: eyes dilating, lungs breathing deeper, digestion slowing down, blood moving to large muscles, cortisol and adrenaline released, etc. Although this seems dramatic, it served an important purpose – it was an adaptive survival function that kept us alive by giving us the quick response and energy to either fight or flee.

Today, we have fewer life-threatening stresses on a normal day. Yet the body's fight-or-flight response is activated by a whole range of stressful events and situations. The physical dangers from the past have been replaced by social and psychological stresses from today that are not worthy of the full fight-or-flight response. Your body doesn't know that current pressures are not life threatening but reacts the same way it did when it was a caveman facing danger.

In today's complex society, our body is not just reacting; it is overreacting. Stress was meant to be dealt with in short bursts – on or off, not the prolonged and chronic stress that we deal with routinely. In a similar fashion, your car is meant to have the accelerator and brakes applied separately and as needed, not constant



braking and driving at the same time. Stress is a good thing because it keeps us alive. Who wouldn't want that? But if we are unaware of our own personal stress and, more importantly, are unable to manage and develop resiliency, stress becomes a very bad thing.

Stress is really not the problem – the problem is our inability to change. Stress is simply the body's way of communicating with us through symptoms that something in our life needs attention. The real problem is that we either (1) do not see, know or understand why we are feeling stressed in the first place or (2) we know the root cause of the stress, but we don't want to address the problem. The latter requires choice and responsibility.

Although most people consider stress to be a very bad thing, it can actually be a good thing under certain circumstances, particularly if one's goal is to experience well-being. For instance, stress can make a person become more aware and alert when they are off course; the body literally communicates the "problem" through symptoms. This is helpful because it gives a person the opportunity to make the appropriate changes to get back on track.

The best way to alleviate stress is to change something in your life. Change can come in many forms – you can change your understanding of a problem, change your communication strategy, change your time management, change the goals, change the interpretation, etc. Although this type of change is easy to recommend, it is often difficult to execute because it forces a person out of their comfort zone.

Comfort zones are predictable, safe and controlled. The brain interprets events outside the comfort zone to be unknown and therefore unsafe. The comfort zone is really nothing more than your subconscious mind's range as to "where you belong." It is like the thermostat that keeps you where you are most comfortable and familiar. Movement outside our comfort zone can activate the body's sympathetic nervous system's fight-or-flight response. To top it off, no one can change for us – we are in this by ourselves.

Given this, we can conclude that stress is fundamentally not the problem – the problem is our inability to change the following:

- **Perceptions of the challenge (cognitive)**
- **How we react (behavior)**
- **How we feel (emotional)**

Once a person explores their own difficulties with change, they can flirt with and explore all of the ways they would personally like to change and grow.

I realize my interpretation of stress may appear overly simple – changing perceptions, behavior and emotions – but these really are the root of stress management. To help facilitate real stress management, I learned years ago to use meditation as a primary vehicle to support personal change. The art of meditation has been passed down through the generations, and it teaches us how to build resilience, change that which we have control over and leave the rest to random chaos and noise in our larger system. There are a million ways to meditate – the secret is to find a method that works for you. Personally and professionally I have leaned very heavily on techniques such as Emotional Freedom Technique, HeartMath, Quantum Touch, Healing Codes and basic mindfulness. I practice these techniques every morning before work, throughout my work day and in the evening, and they provide me with new levels of resilience. They are simple to use, are well researched and provide life-changing outcomes.

As I reflect back over 2016 and prepare for a healthy and happy 2017, I, too, need to remind myself that stress is a good thing – if I am listening. Remember that stress is not the problem; it is simply the body's way of communicating to us through symptoms that we are off balance. We alone need to change how we perceive the world, change how we react and change how we feel.

I hope 2017 is an amazing year for you, your family, your work groups, your companies, your communities and your planet.



*Dr. Chance Eaton has over a decade's worth of experience working in the field of Learning & Organizational Development. Due to his unique educational and work experiences in finance, psychology, leadership & management, education, noetic sciences, and agriculture, Dr. Eaton provides his clients with relevant business solutions grounded in theory and research. To learn more about Dr. Eaton's services, please visit [www.HRSolutionsInternational.com](http://www.HRSolutionsInternational.com).*