

CAPTURING GOOD STRESS ON THE LEADERSHIP BATTLEFIELD

A LEADER'S GUIDE FOR BECOMING MORE RESILIENT AND PRODUCTIVE WITH STRESS

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Excerpt from Chapter 1: Manage Stress or It Will Manage You

..."I could never tell Paul of my fear of being on this seemingly endless body of deep ocean water with only the flat of the horizon and the distant coastline in sight. I guess, as with many men, I was not prone to sharing at this time these feelings of being vulnerable. This fear almost turned to panic when Paul handed the tiller to me to steer the vessel. With winds filling the white billowing sails, but barely able to see any land, the discomfort no doubt became readily apparent on my face. Paul must have seen grimaces that spoke of the terror I felt, but could not express. I suppose he thought a little humor might work so he told me that there was only a mile to land. Pausing for a minute, he smiled and continued. 'Straight down!' Not a very funny joke at the time I thought. It didn't help me out very much.

"Paul insisted I continue on with this experiment despite my fear. As time passed, I forgot that I was in perilous waters. As part of getting back to shore, which couldn't have happened quick enough for me this first time, I picked a point on the horizon and headed towards this point. It was at this moment I realized that there was an art involved in sailing. It was all in the feel of the water and the wind. When the wind and/or current blew the vessel in one direction, sometimes I would go with it, loosening my grip on the tiller if it allowed nature's forces to propel us in the right general direction. At other times I would hold on to the tiller and shift the position of the hanging sails to recapture the whipping wind to move us forward toward the land looming on the horizon. Being in control of the boat meant getting a feel for the wind and the water currents, accepting that they were a force in our forward movement, and choosing when to bow to this force, or to manage its energy to get us home.

"So," Trey questioned out loud, knowing he would provide the answer, "how does this story help us understand the relationship between choice, personal control, and stress? Well, navigation through stress can sometimes be like sailing as I just described it. This means choosing among a number of options. These options include learning how and when to use the tools available to you to manage the situation, knowing when to accept what is happening and that it is okay to let go of the efforts to control this, and recognizing which of these paths is the most appropriate to choose. Being in control really sometimes involves having the ability to make choices among the possibilities I mentioned." "That helps, Trey," Hedda pensively acknowledged. "Sometimes letting go can mean I am in control as well, although it may not feel that way." "That's right, Hedda", Trey said. "As long as you are able to make the choice to let go, the feeling of being in control can be the same. Let me speak briefly about a concept that might help to make this point a bit clearer.

Excerpt from Chapter 1: Manage Stress or It Will Manage You (continued)

"This is the concept of locus of control. As a simple explanation of this concept, those who have an internal locus of control perceive that they have control of where their life is going and their ability to manage life events. In contrast, individuals who have an external locus of control perceive that it is factors beyond themselves that control the direction of their life and their capacity to influence what happens to them. Here's an example. In my sailing experience, I felt as if I was in control of the boat when I moved the tiller and maneuvered the sail, even though it was the power of the wind and current that I was harnessing to make the boat move forward. This perception I had is part of the feeling of having an internal locus of control. Maintaining this internal locus of control is important in navigating through the stressful situations you encounter in your roles. You can imagine how much strain I would have felt when sailing if I believed, inaccurately so, that the winds and water currents were too strong for me and they were going to send me out to deeper water. With this perspective, the forces I mentioned would have seemingly been exerting their control over me. What I just described is the feeling associated with an external locus of control."

"It sounds as if seeking to establish this internal locus of control would be an important goal for us to pursue individually, Trey," Sue commented. "Attaining this goal would allow us to focus on the other challenges we discussed that leaders face and to better utilize our creative energies to address these." "That's very true, Suze," Trey responded. "More specifically though, those individuals who feel they have a high sense of control in their environments, meaning a strong internal locus of control, are more resilient and better able to manage stress." "What Sue said I think captures the essence of what our training will provide, Trey," Prince interjected, "which is to expand this sense of control, the internal locus of control you described." "That's an important part of the training, Prince, and certainly a goal that is worthwhile," Trey responded. "However, there are certainly skills and information we will review that also contribute to becoming resilient, and thus more effective in managing stress." "The concept is much clearer now, Trey, so thank you," Hedda offered after checking to see that Prince had finished his thoughts."...