

REBOOT

Strategies to Reboot & Refresh

Build resilience in yourself and those around you with these tips.

As stress in the workplace rises, so do increased absenteeism and lost production. Every organization needs to help workers develop tools so that stress doesn't affect their job performance or quality of life, says Cynthia Howard (eileadership.org), an executive coach and performance expert.

Howard offers these strategies you and others in your organization can use to build a tolerance to stress and perform at high levels even during stressful situations:

On a count of four, breathe. The goal is breathing with intention to shift the stress effect. Howard suggests taking four deep breaths – breathing in on the count of four, holding on four, exhaling on four. In the throes of emotion, breathing becomes shallow and less effective in blowing off the buildup of carbon dioxide – the opposite of what the body needs to stay energized.

Take a moment: the three-second transition. Used at different parts of the day, such as before and after a meeting or difficult conversation, this strategy helps develop the feeling of being in the moment. “Be deliberate with three seconds,” Howard says. “Pause, breathe, and focus on what you are going to do – for three seconds. This slows down your mind and opens your awareness. With practice, it will also expand your situational awareness and lead to more enjoyment of your day.”

Practice everyday mindfulness. Because many people are distracted in a social-media-filled world, Howard says, it's hard for them to focus for long periods. Mindfulness can tune out distractions. “Mindfulness means directing your attention to what is happening in the moment without judging what is happening,” Howard says. “This practice improves the quality of your attention and decreases your reactivity to stress.”

Keep a journal. Howard suggests taking 10 minutes each day to write out thoughts. “This practice will increase self-awareness and build your ability to stay in the moment,” Howard says. “You will get to know yourself at a deeper level and, with that, get to the real motives that drive your choices and behavior.” Set a time limit to do your journaling. Have specific goals in mind – reflecting on a conversation, recapping your day, digging deeper into your reaction to something. Every few months, go back and review your journal. Have you made progress?

“We tend to expend more energy than we renew,” Howard says. “Most people go through the day with constant interruptions, irritations, and other emotional triggers, all draining energy. It's essential to use some type of stress-relief strategy every day to keep our energy stores filled.”

REFRESH

“Perfect is the enemy of done.”

Three Questions, Three Seconds

“The daily review” is the discipline of asking three questions at the end of the day and writing out the answers. This practice will protect you from being overly optimistic or getting derailed by despair, as Cynthia Howard explains in *The Resilient Leader: Mindset Makeover*. She recommends you jot down three things:

1. What worked?
2. What didn't work?
3. What's next?

Do this every day. On Fridays, do a weekly review. At the end of the year, you'll have a record of your progress and what you need to focus on next year. Keep it handy. Follow through.

Don't overthink your answers, Howard warns. This process is designed for a quick overview.

If you ask your team to answer the same questions, you'll have a log of successes and failures everyone can use to make improvements. You can also use these questions as coaching tools.

In addition to asking three questions, consider taking three seconds to savor the moment, to pause, to focus. For instance, as you start your day, rather than going through the motions of turning on your computer, looking through your inbox, and scrolling through e-mails, take three seconds to breathe deeply, clear your mind, and bring your full attention to the present instant. Do the same thing throughout the day, using a three-second reboot to reduce the clutter in your mind, refresh your attention, and remind yourself of what matters most.

All the Reasons Not to Keep a Journal

Journaling is a critical practice for any leader. Yet few leaders make time for it. Sue Hawkes, author of *Maximizing Success Journals, Volumes 1 and 2*, has heard the same excuses echoed by too many great leaders:

I don't have time. If you're waiting for a big void in your calendar, it won't happen. You need to make a commitment. If you commit to 10 minutes and write for five, you win. If you go longer, you still win. “If you can't make it work for 10 minutes, you should try for double,” Hawkes says. “You need it more than most people.” Try it for 21 days, and it will become a habit.

Someone could find my journal and read it. If you're really concerned, keep it with you. Or put it in a lockbox or on your computer with a password to protect it. There are apps and web services that offer privacy for journaling.

I'm not a “good” writer. Most people aren't, and it doesn't matter. Your journal is just for you. You can draw, doodle, dream, emote. Good is in your mind; perfect is the enemy of done.

Power Plays to Boost Resilience

What's holding you back may not be what's happening but, rather, the way you react to what's happening. Build awareness, resilience, and capacity in yourself and your team with articles such as these at [NonprofitWorld.org](https://www.nonprofitworld.org):

When It Comes to Time Management, It's All about Energy (Vol. 36, No. 4)

A Path to Stronger Programs, Greater Engagement, and Less Burnout? (Vol. 36, No. 1)

The Overwhelmed Office: Six Fixes for the Stressed-Out, Productivity-Challenged Workplace (Vol. 28, No. 4)

Embrace Mindfulness as a Leadership Practice (Vol. 36, No. 2)

Don't Let “Sick” Workers Undermine Your Organization (Vol. 23, No. 1)

Overcome People's Resistance with These Steps (Vol. 38, No. 3)

Vacation Time: More than an Administrative Matter (Vol. 24, No. 2)

Think, Dream, and Do (Vol. 28, No. 6)

Time's Up! What Do you Really Want? (Vol. 33, No. 2)

Find Your Truths and Release Your Powerful Energy (Vol. 31, No. 3)

Counteract Stress to Make the Best Decisions (Vol. 28, No. 1)

I'm not sure how it benefits me. And you never will unless you begin.

I don't know where to start or what to write about. That's why Sue Hawkes created her *Maximizing Success Journals, Volume 1 and 2* (suehawkes.com). It has themes for each week and a question on every page, so it's easy to begin. Examples of her helpful prompts to get you started:

- What are my expectations for the coming week?
- How will I be intentional with my time?
- What do I need to prepare myself for?
- What am I most excited about?
- Who do I need to connect with?
- What do I need to let go of?

It's worth seeing your thoughts and patterns over time. Besides, journaling is cheaper than therapy and often saves you from unnecessary pain. The hardest part is getting started, and Sue Hawkes has made easier with her useful books. 