

# Counteract Stress to Make the Best Decisions



Stress can get in the way of solving problems and making good judgments. Use these exercises to reduce tension, open your mind, and create breakthroughs.

By Peter T. Lambrou

How do you manage stress when you can't change the situation? Here are three strategies that will pay dividends:

## 1. Visualize.

Find a comfortable place where you won't be disturbed for about five minutes. Sit with your eyes closed, and imagine a positive outcome for whatever problem is causing stress. Be as robust in your imagery as possible: Conjure up the sights, sounds, voices, and feelings you'll experience as the positive result occurs. You're programming your subconscious mind to help you solve the problem, and you're engaging the positive emotions now that you'll feel then.

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When you envision a solution to a problem, you're already part way to solving it. Generating the positive emotions associated with the resolution gives relief in the present moment. You can repeat this exercise a few times a day until you obtain the result you want.

## 2. Breathe.

An exercise called balanced breathing incorporates elements of yoga to balance your emotional "right brain" with your rational "left brain" so that you're using all your resources to best advantage.

While seated, cross your left ankle over your right. Extend your arms in front of you with the backs of your hands touching each other. Cross your right arm over your left so that your palms face each other.

Now clasp your hands together and lower them to your lap. That's the posture.

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Next, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you breathe in, touch your tongue to the roof of your mouth, and as you exhale out your mouth, relax your tongue down. Continue this exercise for two or three minutes.

## 3. Shift Your Focus.

Next time you're in a stressful situation, use a strategy called empirical reality testing. Test the reality of your thoughts as if you were in a courtroom, asking yourself questions such as:

- What evidence supports your feared outcome?
- What happened in the past under similar conditions?
- What options are available?
- What have others done in situations like this one?
- What might reasoned opinions from objective observers suggest?

If you're worrying that fewer donations means failure, for example, step back and ask, "What evidence is there that less funding equals

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failure?" And remember, your emotions aren't evidence. If you test for reality and the evidence is, "Last time donations were down, we had to work harder, but it turned out all right," that becomes evidence that catastrophe isn't likely. Instead of wringing your hands, you can channel your energy into productive activity.

Your beliefs about a situation are powerful. As Henry Ford once said, "Believe you can or believe you can't. Either way you will be right." ■

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## RESOURCES

Pretrus, Teodor & Brian Kleiner, "A Three-Step Approach to Managing Workplace Stress," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 22, No. 1.

Teratanavat, Ratachai et al., "How to Reduce Employee Stress," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 24, No. 3.

These resources are available at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members).