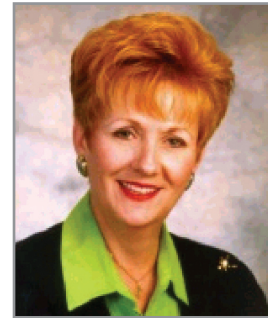


Dear Dr. Mazie,

No matter how hard I try to keep all my priorities in order, the demands at work and at home seem to keep mounting. I know this kind of stress is the new normal these days, but can you give me some tips for coping with the never ending "to do" list?



– Connie in Oregon

I certainly empathize with you. Coping with increasing work demands and dealing with unrelieved stress is a challenge we all face. It's no longer about whether or not we have stress. Rather, it's about identifying what creates stress for each of us and finding tools to help us attain some balance in our work and home lives. So let's review some of my best stress-busting strategies and see if they can help you de-stress your life.

Identify your Stressors

It sounds easy, but people rarely take the time to list those things that stress them out the most. If you want to relieve stress, it's essential to start by making a detailed list of exactly what stresses you out. Be specific and note whether your stressors come from external or internal sources.

Define your Priorities

It's easy to see why success, power, money, position and material goods have taken priority over our relationships, family life, parenting and helping others. But if we had to pick and choose, how would we know what our true priorities should be? Is it all about having more stuff? Our priorities need to be established based on what we value most. Take some time to identify exactly what lends purpose and meaning to your life. Make a list of value-based priorities in your life and be honest about what truly matters to you.

Set Boundaries

We try, but it's nearly impossible to be the perfect boss, employee, parent, friend and spouse. It's this desire however, that adds to our stress levels. Most of us have difficulty saying "no" when we're asked to do something. But saying no is your right and your responsibility – at work, home, with your significant other and certainly with your children. It's not easy. Old habits are hard to break. But once you've defined your priorities, it's easier to set some boundaries. Just remember that your priorities are not necessarily shared by someone else, so demands will still press upon you at times. If you find yourself feeling guilty about saying no, there are some great books out there that address the issue and help you learn to say no without an apologetic explanation.

Learn to Delegate

Simplify your life whenever and however you can. Delegating is a great way to share the responsibilities that keep mounting. At work, negotiate with your superiors and co-workers when you're faced with an unrealistic project deadline. At home, remember that children can do many things, even at young ages. This helps them learn the meaning of responsibility. Divide chores and be realistic about your limitations. It's an important form of self-care and can go a long way in relieving stress.

Establish a Schedule

With so many interruptions and distractions, it's a wonder we get anything done. Whether you are a planner or considered to be a spontaneous person, schedules serve as a de-stressor. Keep a daily to-do list at home and at work. Make sure to put the three most important tasks at the top of the list. Cross them off one at a time, and you will feel an amazing sense of accomplishment. Just be sure to give yourself enough time so that you're not always feeling rushed and anxious.

Make Time for Yourself

There is nothing wrong with setting aside some "me" time. Everyone needs a certain amount of time to unwind, relax and de-stress. In fact, that's one of the best ways to make sure your body's immune system can operate at its maximum level of efficiency. Identify what gives you a reprieve from the stresses of home life and work. Whether it's reading, exercising, various hobbies or sports, be sure to block out some regular time for yourself.

Taking time to de-stress your life is a commitment to healthy self-care and nurturance. If you add some regular exercise, a healthy diet and plenty of sleep to your life, you will find it is well worth the time and effort.

A nationally recognized speaker, workshop leader and trainer, Dr. Mazie Leftwich, Psy.D has a clinical background in applied psychology with expertise in organizational and personal development. She is Senior Vice President of Contract Land Staff, LLC, where she oversees training and team excellence programs.