

# Cynthia Ackrill, MD

Speaker, Leadership Coach, Stress Expert

<http://www.cynthiaackrill.com>

828.777.9730

[cindi@cynthiaackrill.com](mailto:cindi@cynthiaackrill.com)

## Creating Stress Strategies to Support Your Life

*Do you want to keep playing “Whack-a-mole” and react to everything thrown your way, or do you want to take the time to create proactive strategies that will support your best energy, focus, health, and happiness?*

1. Start by building up your **self-awareness**. How do you know when you are stressed? How is your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy throughout the day? Learn to routinely ask yourself what you really need in that moment- a stretch, a break, a connection? Set your cell alarm, use low-tech dots, or one of the many apps that help you build habits around self-care.
2. Learn a quick **Cool Down to Power Up** technique to use in the first moments you feel stressed. Use [breathwork](#), channel a positive emotion or gratitude, or use a mantra to restore your perspective to neutral so you have full access to your power to mindfully choose your responses instead of reacting.
3. Set up **your most important meeting**- with yourself- to assess the bigger picture and create strategies. Put it on your calendar- seriously!
4. Start with your **Why** – the big picture. What do you **value**? What do you want your life to represent? How do you want people to experience you? What is your **mission or purpose**? This is what motivates you intrinsically and will sustain you through the rough times.
5. What **strengths** do you bring to challenges?  
<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires.aspx>.  
Take the VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire- it's free!
6. What is your **best mindset, attitude**? (Think who you are when you are at your best?) Proactively deciding **who you want to be** sets you up for wiser decisions about what you want to do.
7. From these create your **mantra or GPS**—a word or statement that reminds you of who you are at your best and opens your perspective to the bigger picture. Repeat it; writing this keeps you mindful when challenges threaten to kick you into mindless survival mode.

8. Do an **energy/stress audit**. (Download [paper plate exercise](#))

a. **What's on your plate taking up your precious time, energy, and focus = ENERGY OUT.**

Include the obvious and then go back and fill in the rest

Family, Friends, Work, Household, Pets, Community, Church, Finances, Other projects, Self-Improvement, "Should's," Worries, Emotions, Stories, Guilt, Dreams, Etc. Write down anything on which you spend mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual energy.

Which things best represent your values? Which are in line with your purpose?

Which use your unique strengths?

Which particularly trigger your stress reaction?

b. **Then write down what supports you = ENERGY IN.**

Write on the bottom of the plate what supports you.

What do you do to take care of yourself?

What renews you, gives you energy- physically, mentally, emotionally spiritually?

Think of the universal needs- food, water, rest, sleep, exercise, social connection... and then those things that are more personal for you- time outside, a hobby, alone time, etc.

9. What can you do to **reduce the stressor load**? DELEGATE, DELETE, DEFER

Delegate your "less strong" areas- there is no reason to prove you can do it all.

Update your energy expenditures- get rid of the things that no longer serve your values, mission, purpose.

Move some things to the "someday/maybe" list instead of having them hang around your list making you feel incomplete.

10. How can you **realign your perspective**? Use your mantra or GPS to mindfully put the stressors that remain into the bigger picture. Create habits of mindset. The 5-C's are not just for diamonds:

- Clear
- Calm
- Curious
- Courageous
- Compassionate (especially self-compassionate)

Need to reframe something? Ask yourself **4 Questions- 3 What's and a Who©**:

- i. What's the real data?
- ii. What story or assumptions am I adding?
- iii. What's really needed right now (for me or the situation)?
- iv. Who do I want to be right now?

Asking these will help you put boundaries around what you can control and use curiosity to ramp up your smarter brain. Your ultimate sense of control is deciding who you want to be in any situation- that's leadership!

11. **Build up your resilience.** Life is full of stressors and we can increase our strengths and adaptability to meet the challenges. Choose habits that support your energy- physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We have universal critical needs- such as nutrition, exercise, sleep, rest, play, social connection. And then we have individual things that we need to feel complete or energized. Make them habits.

12. **Stay Accountable** to yourself. Create a regular check in system to reassess, readjust, stay mindful. Put you on your calendar- it will be the best time investment you can make.
13. **CELEBRATE YOUR WINS!!!** This is truly critical. We are hardwired to continually measure what we have not accomplished or how far it is to a goal, but we actually succeed more when we celebrate each forward step.

Questions? Please ask! (Curiosity slays stress.) To your health and success,  
Cindi 828-777-9730, [cindi@cynthiaackrill.com](mailto:cindi@cynthiaackrill.com)