

12 Ways to Take the Stress Out of Stress Reduction

All of us are hoping that the stress of COVID will disappear when COVID disappears. But one thing we hope *never* disappears: the realization that stress is human, we are not alone in the challenges and stressors we face, and it is okay to admit when we are overwhelmed—even at work, even if we are in the wellness business.

Sadly, until the pandemic forced us to face our limits, most of us believed in the myth that we “ought” to be able to handle stress and that stress at work indicated that we were on the road to success rather than exhaustion, burnout, job loss, or even [heart attacks](#).

Chronic stress affects the brain, raising the level of cortisol, a hormone that stimulates our bodies to act rather than think—in fact, it interferes with our ability to learn and concentrate. In the US economy, stress comes with a \$600 billion price tag for lost productivity, turnover, and distraction. It silently erodes focus, energy, health, happiness, relationships, and meaning.

[Repeated studies](#) have shown that, even in the best of times, members of the spa and wellness hospitality sector are as vulnerable to stress as everyone else. Heavy workloads, the constant pressure of interpersonal relationships, and sometimes difficult working conditions all ignite stress for you and your staff even as you dedicate yourself to helping others.

You're stressed. Your people are stressed. And since, thanks to mirror neurons, stress is just as contagious as laughter or boredom, your clients are stressed. Ironically the one thing you cannot do is transport your entire staff to some other wellness destination to unwind. So, what options will help soothe everyone's stress and stop the spread of burnout, turnover, and unhappiness? The best stress relief programs help you to:

- 1. Know what (and when) to ask.** If your staff haven't already spoken up about their stress during COVID, they might appreciate help in finding the words, and especially in feeling safe to name the real challenges and brainstorm solutions. They might not realize that stress itself reduces fluency and the ability to think analytically. If you haven't spoken up about the pressures you face, maybe they think you have super-powers that they ought to have, but don't. Before you arrange for a program that will only complicate everyone's lives further or create situations some people find scary or silly or, yes, stressful, talk with each other about what would really help.
- 2. Let yourself hear the answers.** You may not want to hear what your staff has to say about the sources of their stress, but their stress is contributing to your stress and vice versa. No one makes a bandage big enough to cover those problems or a magic wand to wave (darn it!) But when you listen with an open mind, curiosity, and

a willingness to brainstorm with your staff, you'll find solutions together that may surprise you.

- 3. Open up options.** Every person and every workplace has different challenges, strengths, values, and preferences. A program that relieves stress for one may increase it for another. There must also be respect for those who need some issues to be kept private, whether inside or outside work. Seek a program that acknowledges those human differences and allows you and your staff to find the individual strategy and motivation that works for each of you.
- 4. Fit your organization and culture.** When a big gap looms between your current workplace situation and culture vs. your vision for the future, you set everyone up for failure. If you lurch from strategy to strategy and program to program, the gap widens even more, eroding faith and engagement. While the principles of stress management are universal, the recipes for success are not. You need learning tools, metrics, and agreements that make sense of your current experience and make choices and growth seem possible. As Yogi Berra once said, "If you don't know where you are going, you might end up someplace else."
- 5. Provide the right environment.** The happier you are, the happier your staff and your clients—and, in turn, the happier you are. Happiness feeds happiness, success, health, and ultimately profits. That's how the brain is wired. The right environment and culture create a place of safety where thoughts are free to flourish and compassion, support, change, and learning can take place for everyone. You may need help in building that environment and culture—or rebuilding it after the trauma and toll of COVID.
- 6. Extend compassion to you.** You cannot expect your staff to deal with their stress until you deal with your own. When you show your own vulnerability and your willingness to understand and deal with stress, the benefits of stress reduction become blazingly clear to everyone. The words you say out loud and between your ears matter. You may need individual coaching and support to help you learn new skills, reduce your stress levels, and adjust your role to one that is more supportive of your own needs as well as your staff's.
- 7. Build a community.** A great stress reduction program builds everyone's understanding of what humans need to thrive. It should give you and your staff a common grasp of the human operating system and a common language for talking about challenges; it should help you all contribute to a supportive, stress-free culture that helps you, your staff, and your clients relax into the "ahhh."
- 8. Satisfy your curiosity.** Curiosity is a powerful antidote to stress. How are humans wired to produce and counter stress? What does a healthy, productive mind need? How can you and your staff find the balance between work demands and your individual capacity so that you avoid the triggers of stress and build confidence in yourselves and each other?
- 9. Remember what fun is like.** Don't let stress management become one more "should" on an already too long list. People are wired to learn better through play and fun. In fact, the spa and wellness hospitality is built on that truth and on the universal ache to renew mind, body, and spirit. Do for yourself and your staff what you aim to do for your clients. As you each apply what you know to each other and open yourselves to new ideas, you'll share, gain, and practice techniques that will ultimately benefit your clients and your bottom line.
- 10. Build on success.** Stress can become a habit, even an expectation: "If you can't handle the stress, you don't belong here." Like any habit, it takes a while to break. If the goals are too big, they feel unreachable; if they are too small, they feel irrelevant. Behavior change requires understanding, motivation, and lots of support, both at

work and at home. Concentrate on making one change at a time, rather than upending your entire culture and organization at a blow. You might address stress in communications, then non-violent communication, then growing positivity, then how to manage stressed people, and so on. Just dropping tools into people's laps rarely works: they need time for practice, reflection, repetition, and accountability.

11. Measure your achievements. Define metrics that will help you and your staff track your improvement in specific behaviors and desired outcomes. For example, have you paid more attention to hydration, taken more breaks for 10-minute mindfulness exercises, or shared moments of appreciation? Create rewards for reaching metrics. As staff become energized and clients spread the word about the great atmosphere at your spa and wellness resort, you will also see your achievements reflected in your profits.

12. Celebrate the wins. Celebrate every win; keep telling every success story; and inspire everyone with your vision of a stress-smart, stress-strong, and stress-wise future. Wins are contagious, too!

Given the overwhelming number of stress solutions, choosing the one that's right for you may feel overwhelming. As a certified leader in the field of stress management for almost two decades and a recognized specialist in the neuropsychology of stress, I have helped businesses just like yours to find and implement solutions that work. I'd love to help you sort out your unique challenges and brainstorm the possibilities. And I always appreciate hearing your hard-earned wisdom as we work together to thrive.

A conversation to clarify is always a good start—[please reach out!](#)