**Chapter Eight**

**Managing Stress**

We begin our discussion of stress by identifying it as a contributor to conflict. Stressed people may more easily fly off the handle and perhaps even turn violent. We also identify four types of stress. Eustress is a short-term stress that encourages us to take more seriously and expend more energy on important activities. Hypostress, or underload, occurs when we’re bored or unchallenged by our situations. Because the eustress and hypostress are only temporary and do not lead to significant conflicts, we focused on hyperstress and distress, which offer greater challenges to the conflict manager. Hyperstress occurs when too many tasks and responsibilities pile up on us and we are unable to adapt to the changes or cope with all that is happening at once. One distinguishing feature of hyperstress is that the source is usually clearly identifiable and clears up quickly if we eliminate it. Hyperstress makes it easy to experience an overblown conflict, which occurs when people greatly exaggerate a conflict, generally using a relatively unimportant issue as a focal point. The conflict is overblown by one or more of the parties who invests far more emotion and energy than usual. Some specific techniques for dealing with hyperstress are listed in the chapter.

Distress arises when we don’t feel control over the situation and when the source of stress is unclear.

Distress is more encompassing than the other forms of stress. It relates more to our world view, personality (Type A, too controlling, workaholic, etc.), and self-fulfilling prophecy (or expectations). Because distress can make us appear difficult or act in ways that appear unpleasant to others, it can contribute to conflict proneness.

Conflict proneness due to distress occurs when people take themselves too seriously, don’t enjoy what they are doing, or fail to see the humor in their everyday affairs. Distress makes people unhappy and difficult to work or live with.

While some specific techniques are listed in the chapter for dealing with distress, a more encompassing way to manage distress is to develop a playful spirit. We suggest three ways to do that: Make a distinction between work and play, striving for balance between them; turn work into play so that you enjoy what you do; and learn how to appreciate the bad with the good because some suffering makes us better appreciate good fortune when it occurs.

There is another more general way to deal with hyperstress and distress which is known as the ABC model. The letter A stands for the activating event or stressor; B means our relevant beliefs or thoughts; and C refers to the consequences or effects and reaction to the stressor. In addition to identifying stressors and relating them to consequences, the model also shows us the important role played by our thoughts and beliefs.

We can avoid stress by minimizing the number of irrational thoughts we entertain. We can monitor our emotional reactions to problematic situations and ask what feelings different events are arousing in us. We can record our self-talk and make sure it is positive rather than negative. When you write down what you are saying to yourself such as something like, “I am a failure because I received an F on this algebra test,” it is easier to see that it is irrational. By writing down your self-talk, you can also dispute your irrational beliefs by writing down rational statements instead. If your negative self-talk includes a statement like, “I’ll never understand this subject,” you can dispute that by listing what you already do understand and listing places where you can seek help on this section.

If you are doing your best to alleviate hyperstress as it occurs, and to avoid distress when you can, you are much less likely to engage in destructive conflicts. When we are stressed, it is more difficult to practice good communication skills. Empathy is difficult during periods of hyperstress or distress. It is hard to hear another person out and want to respond to them. Keeping stress at an optimal low level is a way of ensuring competence in communication situations.

**Managing Anger**

Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure, a synonym for antagonism and rage. Anger is different from feeling hurt or irritated. We experience these other emotions when someone or something frustrates our desires. While we recognize that sometimes anger can be used constructively by motivating us to get off our seats and stand up for our interests, needs, and wants or what we think is right, destructive anger carries with it the desire to get even or seek revenge.

Research indicates that people may actually have traitlike anger. In addition, there are gender and age differences in anger and aggression.

People tend to manage their anger in one of the following three different ways: anger-ins, angerouts, or anger controllers. A common feature of anger-ins is that they do not express their anger to the person who has upset them. We would include as anger-ins, people who vent their anger to others, like a friend, parent, colleague, or bartender, rather than the offensive person. Another type of anger-ins are the passive-aggressive individuals, who want to get even without directly confronting the persons they are mad at.

Anger-outs are the direct opposite of anger-ins. They are people who are quick to express their anger, vocally or physically to the person who upsets them.

Anger controllers are those who practice S-TLC, the confrontation ritual (including assertiveness and I-statements), and cooperative negotiation techniques. The chapter also includes some useful dos and don’ts when responding to angry people.

While there may be people who are clearly one type of anger manager than others, many people are more likely a combination of all three. In a situation where you fear the reaction of another person or know you have no effect on that person, you may choose to be an anger-in. In another case, you find that the only way to motivate a person is show some emotion and reveal some anger. Lastly, you may know individuals who listen and cooperate, and who can control their anger by following the S-TLC model, and express it effectively through the use of I-statements. In all cases, the skillful manager is sensitive to the way she or he is feeling, thinking, and behaving in a conflict situation. Knowing which type one currently manifests and how to correctly and effectively manage one’s anger in a conflict situation results in more mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships.

Experts differ in the cause of anger as some underlying emotional factor. Some say it is caused by a perceived loss of control. Others say that the primary emotion is the fear that occurs when our personal security is threatened. Still others say it is a cover-up for loss of self-esteem and sadness. In all these cases, anger protects us; admitting our fear or disappointment may make us feel vulnerable. We must find the underlying fear and deal with it.

**Learning Objectives**

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

● Identify four types of stress.

● Distinguish between hyperstress and distress.

● Identify the sources of hyperstress in your life.

● List some of the likely sources of distress in people’s lives.

● Explain how hyperstress and distress affect your communication behavior in a conflict situation.

● List the three solutions for developing a more playful attitude.

● List some specific techniques for dealing constructively with hyperstress and distress.

● Explain the ABC model, differentiate between positive and negative beliefs, and apply the model to a conflict situation.

● Determine whether you are anger-in, anger-out, or anger-controlling.

● Explain how anger can negatively affect a conflict situation.

● Identify the “primary emotion” that is being interpreted as anger.

● List ways to effectively control your anger and express it in constructive ways.

**Chapter Outline**

**[Objective #1: identify four types of stress.]**

I. Types of Stress

A. Eustress and Hypostress

1. Eustress is a good short-term stress that encourages us to take more seriously and expend more energy on important activities

2. Hypostress, or underload. This happens when we’re bored or unchallenged by our situations.

**[Objective #2: distinguish between hyperstress and distress.]**

**[Objective #3: Identify the sources of hyperstress in your life.]**

**[Objective #4: List some of the likely sources of distress in people’s lives.]**

**[Objective #5: Explain how hyperstress and distress affect your communication**

**behavior in a conflict situation.]**

B. Hyperstress and Distress

1. Hyperstress occurs when too many tasks and responsibilities pile up on us and we are unable to adapt to the changes or cope with all that is happening at once

2. Distress arises when they don’t feel that they have control over the situation and when the source of stress is unclear

**[Objective #6: List some specific techniques for dealing constructively with hyperstress**

**and distress.]**

II. Stress Management

A. Activites Approache

1. Habit of exercise

2. Relaxing hobbies

3. Talking with others

4. Avoiding unnecessary competition

5. Tackle the more difficult tasks first, and then finding a reward

6. Tend and befriend

7. Giving to others

**[Objective #7: Explain the ABC model, differentiate between positive and negative**

**beliefs, and apply the model to a conflict situation.]**

B. The ABC Model of Stress consists of:

1. A = Activating event or the stressor

2. B = Beliefs or our relevant thoughts

3. C = Consequences or effects and reaction to the stressor

C. Monitor “self-talk” that contributes to stress. Avoid

1. shoulds

2. awfuls

3. overgeneralizations

D. How to manage distress: developing a playful spirit

1. Don’t blame yourself for everything that goes wrong or doesn’t pan out.

2. Look for situational factors that you may learn to accept rather than fight against.

3. See irony in problematic situations.

4. Visualize absurdities. Make a joke to yourself of something negative.

5. Ask yourself: Am I happy right now? What can I do now to be happier?

6. Learn to say “No,” without feeling guilty.

7. Take on a new role, which is more enjoyable than the present one.

8. Do something you can succeed at, especially after failing something else.

**[Objective #8: list the three solutions for developing a more playful attitude]**

E. Changing How We Look at Life’s Challenges

1. We can make a distinction between work and play

2. The second way to lighten up is to take the view that “play is an attitude of mind that may pervade any human activity

3. The third solution can be termed integration—one understands that joy and pain are often found in the same place, and that both are to be valued

III. What is Anger?

A. Anger is important—large effects on social relationships

B. Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure, a synonym for antagonism and rage. Anger is different from feeling hurt or irritated

**[Objective #9: Explain how anger can negatively affect a conflict situation.]**

C. Anger may lead to revenge and interpersonal violence

D. Sometimes anger can be used constructively

E. Manifestations

1. Anger can occur instantly with no malice or forethought like the eruption of a volcano in people who are not generally viewed as hostile or aggressive.

2. A second type of anger festers away for days, months, or even years such as when one plans for revenge.

3. Still a third type is attached to people’s personality, always lying just beneath the surface it would seem, but quickly manifesting itself in the form of hostility whenever these individuals feel pressured, defensive, or attacked—trait-like

a. conceptualized as an enduring disposition to experience anger more frequently, more intensely, and for a longer period of time

b. especially attuned to anger-related words

c. responds to angry words more quickly than they do to words reflecting other emotions

d. people who have low-anger trait tend to spontaneously reframe the circumstances in ways that deflect or inhibit their anger

IV. Experiencing Anger

A. Different sources of anger: loss of control, frustration, fear, insecurity, loss, sadness

B. Men and women experience it differently

1. For men, anger is empowering—they have power and it gives them more

2. Women’s anger, on the other hand, emerges out of feelings of frustration and powerlessness

3. As people grow older they are less likely to exhibit trait anger.

4. Anger for older adults (~50s and up) is less frequent and less intense

5. Less overt displays of anger as people age

**[Objective #10: Identify the "primary emotion" that is being interpreted as anger.]**

C Anger as a Secondary Emotion

1. Anger ‘s origin is in other emotions such as fear.

2. Anger protects us; admitting our fears or disappointments may make us feel vulnerable.

**[Objective #11: Determine whether you are anger-in, anger-out, or anger-controlling.]**

V. Managing Anger:

A. Three Common Ways People Express Their Anger.

1. Anger-Ins

a. have a hard time even admitting that they are angry

b. know they are angry with someone but do not want to tell the other person

c, tell others about their anger but not the one who upsets them

d. generally are passive aggressive.

2. Anger-outs

a. automatic reactions, are quick to criticize, blame, and accuse

b. minor aggressive acts such as bickering

c. verbal aggression

d. physical aggression, force

3. Anger controllers Anger controllers are assertive individuals who do not let their feelings control how they respond in conflict situations.

a. think positively about conflict and try techniques to better manage it

b. use assertive communication behavior; employ the steps of the interpersonal confrontation ritual

c. collaborate and work together toward mutually satisfactory solutions

d. use the S-TLC system

e. negotiate

f. manage the conflict climate and stress levels

**[Objective #12: List ways to effectively control your anger and express it in**

**constructive ways]**

B. Before Expressing Anger: Dos and Don’ts

1. Don’t: yell, make threatening gestures, curse or swear, threaten, mock, or use alcohol as a means of courage for expression

2. Do

a. Take time out: Exit temporarily if you can.

b. Do relaxation exercises

c. engage in positive and helpful self-talk

e. Seek alternative ways to release your anger

C. While Interacting: Dos and Don’ts

1. Speaking more loudly or yelling increases anger

2. Standing over another person or invading their personal space

3. Making threatening gestures

4. Poking or pushing or shoving another person

4. Swearing and cursing are unlikely to keep the situation under control.

5. Engaging in threats or using a “thromise” which we said in Chapter 6 is a promise of reward if the other cooperates and a threat of punishment if they do not can heighten anger and escalate conflict.

6. Bring in unrelated issues sensitive to the other

7. Mocking the other

8. Working to increase a competitive atmosphere or encouraging rivalry engenders anger.

10. Not listening to the person at whom you are angry, and allowing yourself to be egged on by bystanders is also dangerous.

11. Expressing anger under the influence of alcohol or drugs is a bad idea.

VI. Responding to Another’s Anger

A. One of the more difficult challenges we must face in a conflict is the anger and possible rage an anger-out person is feeling.

B. Specific Suggestions

1. Remain calm

2. Listen and reflect

3. Acknowledge source of anger

4. Walk away if necessary, but promise to engage later