

## **Stress Management: Reducing and coping with stress - Part 2**

Last time we talked about the importance of initially identifying your stressors. What makes you stressed? Are there any themes to this?

Now, we are going to explore your 'Stress Strategy.' A strategy is like a recipe, you follow each of the steps to achieve the outcome, in this case, stress. Stress doesn't just happen to us, as many people believe. As mentioned last time, it is a natural reaction that is preparing us for fight or flight. We are unconsciously reacting to a given situation, and once we become aware of this, we can therefore consciously control it.

### **'Stress Strategy'**

We have different strategies for everything, from buying goods or services, to falling in love and every strategy starts with a trigger. Once this trigger is activated the strategy will start. Everyone's strategies are different and once you are able to elicit your strategy you can then change it to one which is more congruent with your desired response.

For example, one person's "Stress Strategy" may be as follows:

Trigger – Undesired situation (a looming deadline, a complaint from a client or a notification of the potential for job loss)

Step 1 – The person says to themselves "I knew this was going to happen, things never go how I want"

Step 2 – The person has a heavy feeling of dread in their stomach

Step 3 – The person then visualises themselves "messing up/losing their job"

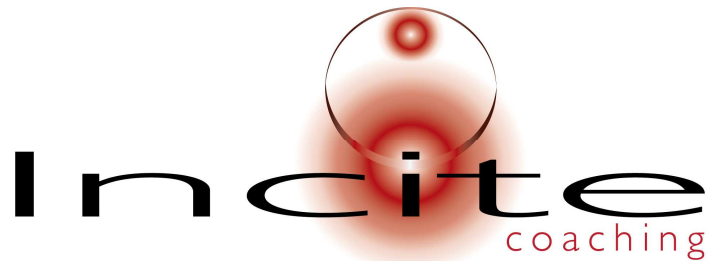
Step 4 – The person feels like the weight of the world is on their shoulders

Step 5 – The person feels like they are in a state of stress and panic.

By determining your 'Stress Strategy' you will be able to consciously change the steps to result in a different response.

### **Eliciting your 'Stress Strategy'**

**Step 1** - Think of a time you were really stressed, take yourself back there now, what did you hear? What did you see and what did you say to yourself? Now go back to the very beginning of the event or situation, when you were feeling fine and getting on with things. What was the very first thing that caused you to start to feel stressed? This is your trigger.



**Step 2** - Now that you have your trigger, ask yourself. What did I do next? Did I say something to myself? Did I get a feeling in my body? Did I get a picture in my mind? Now you have your next step in the recipe.

**Step 3** – repeat the questions in Step 2 until you have your Recipe for Stress.

### **Scrambling your ‘Stress Strategy’**

How would you rather act instead? Consciously scramble your ‘Stress Strategy’ by mixing up your steps turning your Recipe for Stress into a Recipe for Success

### **Tip 2 for reducing stress – Learn to say ‘No’**

Stress can quite often be caused by overwhelm or overwork. Know your limits and stick to them. By saving your time and energy on non-vital tasks, you will be able to invest this time on vital tasks or even more importantly, on you. Most people will not be offended if you say no to them with a valid reason and a solution.

For Example:

“I am sorry John, I just won’t be able to get that work to you by Friday as I have a number of other pressing tasks deadlined for the same day. I would rather invest the appropriate amount of time on your work, so that I can complete it to my usual high standard. How can we action plan a date that is feasible and that we are both happy with?”

If you have always said ‘Yes,’ some people may find it difficult if you say ‘No’ to them initially. Remember to stick by your guns. Young children never give up if they want something, they will keep asking for that toy or chocolate until you give in. Once you give in once, they know that you will give in again. Adults who want something can be similar. Be prepared to say ‘No’ 6 or more times before they give up. It may be hard, but you’ll see the benefit of it in future.

Next time we will explore how you currently cope with stress and then we will explore healthier ways to manage stress.