



Transformational Leadership & Service Podcast

Episode 13 Transcript

All Stressed Up with No Place to Go

Your manager just dumped his latest “high priority” project on your desk – the third this week. Mary from accounting just emailed you asking for the inventory numbers before the end of business today. A secretary at Johnny’s school just called and needs to schedule a meeting with you and Johnny’s principal as soon as possible. There is a message on the recorder from your mother asking if you will be able to stop by for a visit anytime soon.

Sound familiar? For most of the people I know, these scenarios are far from the realm of fiction. Personal and professional pressures, responsibilities, deadlines and change constitute the current realities of life. How do leaders go about managing these constant experiences which frequently prove so stressful?

The basic human stress reaction has been commonly referred to as the “fight or flight” syndrome. Simply put, mentally we decide if we should defend ourselves against or flee from the stressful challenges and situations we face. Past experience tells us that we can run but we can’t hide. Therefore, the best way to fend off the negative effects of stress is to mount a deliberate counter offensive. It’s time to do battle. Consider these simple, yet effective techniques for managing personal stress. They work for me.

1. **Treat yourself to daily exercise.** This is by far the best single activity for managing stress. Since stress is a mental process that manifests itself physically, the best way to neutralize the effects of stress is to work them off – literally. Walk, swim, bike or jog. The activity itself is not critical. What is important is that there is regular, sustained activity. In this case, it **is** important to “sweat the small stuff.”
2. **Be sure to eat right.** This advice comes directly from one who grew up in a southern culture believing, “if it ain’t fried, it ain’t fit to eat!” My southern roots run deep and I still believe fried pork chops are heaven sent. But I now recognize that most things require moderation. The wrong kind of fuel in our cars certainly affects the vehicle’s performance. The same is true for the foods we eat and how they affect the performance of our bodies.

3. **Ask yourself, "Is it worth it?"** Most of the stress we experience today is self-inflicted. Too often, we are more concerned with conforming to someone else's expectation of who we should be, and as a result, we forget what is actually most important to us. When faced with personally stressful situations, take a minute to ask yourself, "Is it worth it?" If the answer is "yes," then proceed with energy and unrestrained enthusiasm. But, if the answer is "no," then take the time to seriously reevaluate your commitment to the leadership process.

I am not suggesting that anyone run out today and quit their job. However, I encounter individuals who find themselves in positions of leadership who have concluded that the process of leading, for them, is no longer worth the effort. For their own good, and that of their followers, I encourage them to step aside and make room for others willing to accept the challenges and stressors of the leadership effort.