

THE TRUE ORIGIN OF STRESS



Giselle Monbiot

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**"STRENGTH IS WITHIN YOU TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU
RESPOND TO YOUR WORLD."**

Stress in the workplace has been directly impacting the health, productivity and motivation of the workforce. It impacts on morale in the workplace and creates the centre to most of the dis-stress, issues and unhappiness at work. The Labour Force Survey reported that “12.5 million working days are lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2016/17” and the HSE reported on 1st November 2018 that “Stress rises are becoming the most common causes of illness in the workplace.” The report recommended that employers need to take more responsibility to care for the health of their employees and try and support them to find ways to better physical and emotional health.

The way stress is often spoken about is that it is an expectation and it is something that needs to be accepted. There is almost a metaphorical badge of honour about how stressed we are feeling, how busy we are and also how tired we are feeling. There is a general under current of competition about how overwhelmed and stressed we are feeling. And if we're not feeling stressed, we almost look for things to be stressed about. However, what I witness on a daily basis with the clients I work with, both in a group setting and individually, no one enjoys the long term impact of feeling like this and it starts to cost them in many different ways. Ultimately, the stress starts to have a negative impact on their health, emotions, energy levels, work life and personal life. The individual is not the only one who is affected by this distress and tension. Businesses receive the brunt of the cost of high stress. This includes sick days, reduced productivity, difficult relationships as communication and motivation reduces. When an individual's effectiveness reduces and more mistakes are made, it directly costs the business time and money.

But how can you help yourself and your employees deal with the stress epidemic? Is

it something that we need to accept as an inevitable part of life or is it something that we have the power to take control of?

Firstly, it is important to know what stress is. Secondly how to recognise stress and then to understand the implications this can have on individuals and within the workplace. Once you understand this, I am going to share the true origin of how stress is created - and it might not be the source that you have been led to believe. And once you understand this, letting go of stress becomes so much easier.

What is the stress?

The stress I'll be talking about is a feeling within you. It is felt as a tension or pressure inside, possibly recognised as a distress. It is a feeling as opposed to experiencing a stressful event. That feeling you have that can show itself as a tightness in your chest or shoulders, or frustration and irritation. It is the tension and feeling in your body that I am referring to today. Some people will feel their whole body as being tense, others can have a tightness in their chest; another may report a rising up of the tension, rising and falling depending on the day. Someone else might have a constant sense of tension that they seem to not notice most of the time as they are so used to it being there. However, you notice the tension as the stress I am speaking about is a feeling within yourself.





Signs of stress

- Rumination - this is repetitively thinking negatively about a problem or challenge without coming to a useful solution. The constant loop of negative thinking can become very consuming and increases the feelings of stress substantially.
- Eating patterns change - Some people will find they overeat on the wrong foods, such as sugar, fatty or highly processed foods at time of stress. Others might stop eating or just managing to eat small amounts.
- Stimulant consumption increase - stimulants can include caffeine, alcohol, sugar, nicotine and/or recreational drugs
- Mood change. Stress can have a big impact on mood. It can create irritability, paranoia, tearfulness, and can reduce self esteem and ease around others.
- Physical sensations in the body. These can include tightness pain in shoulders, stomach can feel in a knot, butterflies or nauseous .
- A heaviness in the chest, palpitations or fast breathing.
- Memory reduced. From lack of sleep, scattered thoughts or lack of focus means the short term memory can become compromised.
- Reduction in ability to problem solve. Too much stress means the brain reduces its ability to think with clarity through problems and challenges that might arise. It creates reactive responses rather than well thought through conclusions.
- Insomnia/ waking up still tired. When going to bed, free from the distraction of the day, you can become aware of the thoughts that are racing around in your head. This can make falling asleep hard - or you might be so exhausted, you fall asleep easily but those thoughts rise you out of sleep at 3am, stopping you from falling back to sleep.
- Overwhelmed and thinking you cannot cope.

Impact of stress on individuals and business

- Professional relationships are going to be affected. Whether it's because you withdraw, become snappy or are distracted, it becomes more challenging to keep relationships unaffected. Increased lack of trust between individuals and teams, increased conflict, more focus on individual performance rather than team/organisational performance.
- People in authority might seem like the attackers, you might become more needy or dependant on those around you or find it hard to respond in a appropriate professional manner.
- Reduction of energy. This can have a big impact on all areas of life and can result in you cutting out activities that can help reduce stress, such as exercise, socialising and completing the tasks you need to be working on.
- Reduced creativity, interest and motivation. Whether relating to work or personal life, this has direct impact on productivity, reducing the purpose of activity and losing connection with the people around you and reducing emotional wellbeing.
- Disorganisation. This means that effectiveness reduces greatly. Productivity, work/life balance and a general ability to prioritise and complete tasks becomes difficult.
- Compromised health leading to increase in sick days taken. Increased adrenaline and cortisol being pumped out with compromised sleep patterns, the immune system weakens leaving you vulnerable to viruses and infection. Long term stress can result in increased blood pressure, diabetes and other illnesses.
- Less commitment, loyalty and enjoyment. As stress builds over time, life becomes overwhelming and loses its enjoyment. The smallest challenge can be perceived as a huge drama. Your resilience reduces which means the challenges others might see as exciting can become scary, intimidating and too much hassle.
- Impact to home life: Not being able to switch off and be present to family and friends. Your personal relationships can become the metaphorical punchbag as you struggle to contain these uncomfortable emotions and feelings you have inside you.



“STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE DIRECTLY AFFECTS THE HEALTH, PRODUCTIVITY AND MOTIVATION OF THE WORKFORCE.”



Benefits of implementing stress reduction

- Increased productivity and effectiveness
- Improved health
- Increased energy and motivation
- Better concentration, problem solving abilities and efficiency
- Improved relationships
- Quality sleep
- Less reactive and more able to respond with more appropriate emotions
- More effective and efficient [including less mistakes/rework]
- More happiness, feelings of contentment and wellbeing
- Increased trust and co-operation between individuals and teams
- Increased productivity and effectiveness
- The power lies within you to change the way you respond to your world.
- Stress in the workplace has been directly impacting the health, productivity and motivation of the workforce.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF STRESS?

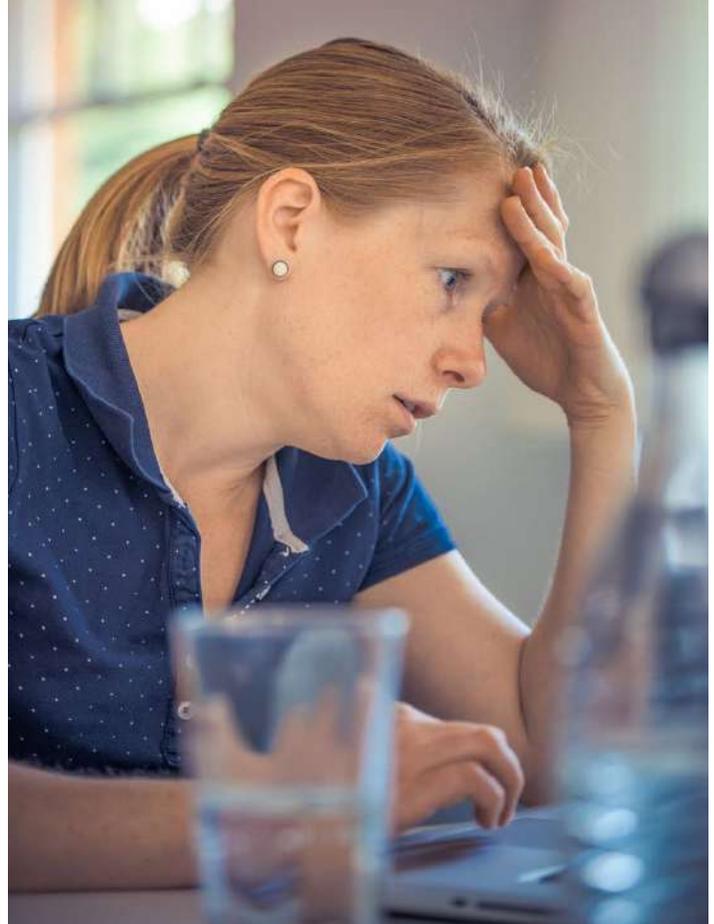
Perhaps this is the part of this book that you believe you know all about. You believe stress to be caused by factors outside of your control; such as the people around you, the to-do-list you need to complete, the many responsibilities you have. But as you read on, you will start to learn a different way of perceiving what the cause of stress actually is.

Firstly, I want to explain a bit about the idea of the term Locus of Control as this is a huge part of the understanding of what I am going to make clear. A locus of control is how much someone believes they can influence events or outcomes that occur in their lives. The main concepts are divided into external locus of control (ELOC) and internal locus of control (ILOC).

External Locus of Control - this is when someone believes the events in their life, be it good or bad, are caused by an external influence that they have no control over. They believe they don't have control over the result so they blame or praise someone else or an external factor for what is happening in their life. Their power is the hands of others. An example is that if they sit an exam and don't get the grade they hoped for, someone with a strong external locus of control will blame the questions being too hard or the teaching hadn't been of a good enough standard or there had been too many distractions in the exam room, or that they had been unlucky with the questions asked.

Believing that you have little or no control on what happens to you can create stress, reduced self esteem and a reduction in drive to take action about a situation you are unhappy with. When you have the belief that life happens to you rather than you having the power to make change in your life and how you respond to these events, it can create dis-stress, tension and a deep sense of disharmony within your life.

It can also make you more reactive to the external world rather than taking purposeful steps. If you believe that the stress you are experiencing at work is all because of expectation your boss places on you, you will believe there are only 2 choices. 1) Try and manage your stress levels so



you don't get completely overwhelmed by them. This way can help you to manage the emotional and physical overload, but still the body is being attacked by the intensity of an overactive stress response of adrenaline and cortisol. You are attempting to reduce the adrenaline levels after it has happened. 2) You leave your job. 2 can be the answer, but as we know, all work has its challenges, relationships with different people and the workload will always be there. How long will it be before your new boss is starting to make you feel stressed and the feeling of being overwhelmed starts to build again. And back to your 2 choices you return. Alternatively, you could go self employed. No boss, but the challenges are still there. So with your strong ELOC you will soon find yourself explaining your stress on the fact you were unlucky in not getting the deal, or juggling the unstable income creates the stress or that you don't have enough time to manage your stress levels.

Ultimately, you could feel resentful that life hasn't been what you had hoped, and completely disempowered. Life owes you and it hasn't delivered.

Internal Locus of Control - this is when someone believes they can directly influence events and outcomes themselves. They take responsibility for their successes and their failures. Their power is in their own hands. Using the example as the failed exam, someone with a strong internal locus of control would recognise they hadn't worked hard enough or had failed to study the areas the exam had focused on. They would focus on how to improve for the next time and how to learn from the experience if this was an important area for them to succeed in.



When you have a strong ILOC you realise you have many choices, it's about working out what choice is best for you. Rather than reacting to the situation, you will work out what you are doing to exacerbate the scenario and what you can do to make it fit more to how you would like it to be. When work is becoming stressful and you realise that you are not coping so well, if you have a strong ILOC, you will look at the various scenarios that might have created these situations. What are you doing to either a) create the problem and b) what can you do to resolve this issue.

You can ensure you have a lot of ways to handle your stress effectively - get good sleep, exercise, meditate, sleep enough and eat well. All good habits to have for a happy healthy life. You can look to your own behaviour, how effectively you are working and the industry you are in. You can change jobs/ careers but using a considered approach as you don't want to create the same situation again. You recognise it is your choices, behaviour and ability that creates your reality - you intend on learning from them. This is a much more empowering way of addressing your life. And can lead to a greater sense of success, self esteem and wellbeing in your life. Resentment isn't present as you take full responsibility for the outcomes of your both your success and your failures.

However, there is an essential part missing of the ILOC's understanding that creates a gap between being fully ILOC and being able to overcome the stress response. The model of what stress is and how to cope with it comes from the idea that stress comes at us from the outside world. What would happen if you flipped that understanding on its head? Let's see.

We are taught that our stress is all caused by external influences. It is our boss; our to-do list; it's our relationship and children; the busyness of our lives; finances and social media. We are then expected to do certain activities to remove the stress that these external factors have caused, with the aim to hopefully feel better for the onslaught the next day. For example, in the traditional belief around stress, we are told the story of how the bad boss and the piles of work create an enormous stress response inside us, building immense stress levels in us. This creates the signs and impacts of stress that I touched on earlier in this book. The only power you have within this model is a) take up meditation, exercise and cut out any foods that add to the stress within your body or b) give up your job. The only power you have is how to reduce or manage the stress so it doesn't build up to breaking point. This model gives you no actual control, just coping strategies from the bombardment from the world around you.

Whilst things like exercise, meditation and healthy eating are essential for good happy lives, the TRUE cause of stress begins within ourselves. Wouldn't it be good to exercise because you want to get fit and healthy and not just because you need to clear your head and body from the intensity of your stressful day? Meditation is so much more relaxing and expanding when you aren't having to wade through intense stressful thoughts and tension in the body. And that is possible with learning one very simple truth.



THE TRUE ORIGIN OF STRESS.

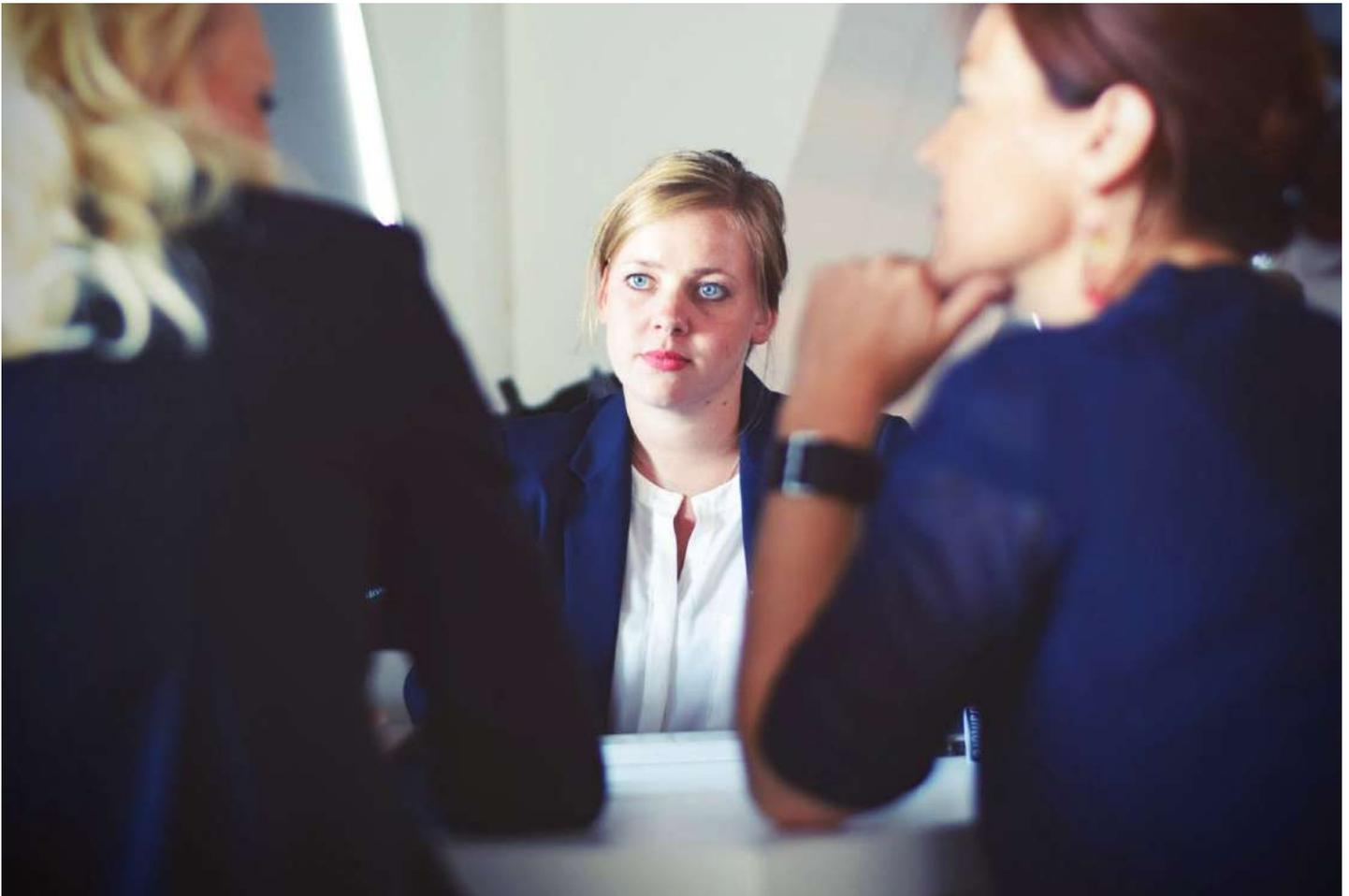


Stress isn't created from the external world. Stress is created within us by our thinking and perception of situations that cause stress on the circumstances themselves. You're not feeling stressed from the behaviour of your boss. You're stressed about how you think about your boss and how you perceive his behaviour. It's not the amount of work that is creating your increased stress levels but what your thoughts are telling you about the workload.

When you are feeling stressed it is a sign of what your thoughts are doing. Stressed feelings means you have stressful thoughts. So if the source of stress is within your thoughts and belief system, it means that the power lies within you to change the way you respond to your world.

Once you understand the true origin of stress, your new insight can be so empowering. A real sense of having a deep ILOC response becomes easier and more fulfilling. To believe your emotions are being created from an ELOC perspective, such as other people, circumstances or the environment you're in, can leave you feeling disempowered which enhances the feelings of stress. There is not a lot to do to make yourself feel any better especially in the long term. However, when you recognise the feelings are created from an ILOC perspective, such as in your mind and belief patterns, you have choices and find yourself in an empowered situation.

Once you can recognise stress isn't created by your workload or lack of time, but understand your stress is caused by the thoughts you have regarding your workload or your perception of how you should arrange your time, it all starts to relieve the feelings of tension. It is not what is happening outside of you that is making you feel stressed, it is your thought process you connect to, created by what you believe should be occurring in your external world that fires off the stress response. This means it is within your power to address your thought patterns, your beliefs around the workplace and work out what your thoughts are focusing on.



THE TRUE ORIGIN OF STRESS IN ACTION



I was recently working with an owner of a company who I will call Steven. He contacted me as he was experiencing high levels of stress. He worked long hours ensuring that his employees were completing their work load correctly. He found them to be lazy and not as effective as he hoped. They wouldn't make decisions or use their initiative. He complained they never went the extra mile that he expected from his staff. This was making his workload unmanageable as he had his own tasks to carry out as well as checking on his staff. No matter how much effort he put in, productivity was reducing and sales were falling. At home, the

stress continued. He was arguing a lot with his wife as she was saying he was disconnected at home and never switched off. She was feeling neglected and he felt he couldn't relate to his children any more. Steven felt like he was failing at work and failing at home.

When I first worked with Steven, he was sleeping badly, saw his staff and family as a barrier to what he was trying to achieve and felt angry they were creating all this stress within him. His only way to cope with the stress was to run for 40 minutes every morning - if he missed one running session he felt he would explode

with frustration. He contacted me when he was finding he was unable to run every day due to his large to do list. He realised something had to change. He wanted me to work with his staff to get them working harder.

Whilst we were speaking I noticed that he blamed his staff for the fact he was having to micromanage them and I suggested we explored this before speaking with his staff. Steven realised that he wasn't enabling his staff to make choices or have any ownership with their work. He couldn't let go of having to make all the decisions because he was driven by a fear of failure. His thoughts were telling him that he needed to check everything because there was the underlying fear he would fail. Ironically, he was taking himself closer to realising that fear because he wasn't letting go. We worked closely with his fear of failure and reframe his perception to be a more productive way of being.

During this time, I spoke with his staff. They were feeling unmotivated and unhappy. They felt bullied and repressed by Steven. They spoke about not having any scope for using their initiative so they had given up trying to be creative. They did the minimum they could and went home as soon as they could. They felt stressed because they weren't able to express their concerns as they had no one to say it to. I taught them about the true origin of stress and ways to address this. Steven and his employees were gaining a greater understanding about themselves and how this acts out in a work setting.

Over a period of time, Steven was able to start delegating the responsibilities out to his staff. They regularly had conversations about what they were doing, what challenges they were experiencing and created ways of overcoming these issues. The employees were feeling valued and heard which meant they started to feel happier. They became more creative and more productive. Sales increased and Steven enjoyed his work life again. As he let go of the reins it meant he was able to let go when he was at home, creating a happier home life again.



**“INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY
AND EFFECTIVENESS”**

START REDUCING STRESS IN YOUR WORKPLACE TODAY.

So how do you begin to start reducing the stress within your workplace?

Firstly, I suggest you look at how you respond to stress before tackling any employees. Start bringing your attention to how your emotions are informing you of the thought process you are having at that moment. Notice how your emotion alters as your thoughts focus on something else. At this time check in with yourself and become aware about whether your experience is ELOC - is it coming from the situation? Or is your experience coming from an ILOC perspective originating from your thinking and perception of what makes your reality?. As you become more aware of your triggers and responses to your thoughts, changes will occur on how you perceive yourself and others as well as the work you do. The greater your awareness becomes of where your response originates the more control you will have of your response.



Secondly, you need to address the levels of cortisol that is in your body. A simple way to reduce rising stress is with my favourite breathing exercise called 7:11 breathing. It is a simple and highly effective way to release built up adrenaline as well as bringing relief from any stress that is building up within you.

- Straighten your back and plant feet firmly on the ground.
- Bring your attention to your breath.
- Whilst breathing from your stomach, inhale for the count of 7. Exhale for the count of 11.
- Allow your eyes to look ahead and defocus.
- IMPORTANT - as you find the rhythm that suits you, make sure your inhalation is shorter than the exhalation.

This is a technique that is good to practice during the day - a minute here and there - to get used to the rhythm. It naturally reduces cortisol that is building in the system. Once you are comfortable with it, then you can use it very effectively in stressful situations – it can be effective with panic attacks.

Thirdly, enable your employees to be able to speak up about the stress they are feeling and to offer them the support and tools they need to reduce the feelings of dis-stress and tension. Rather than believing stress is a normal part of life, guide your staff to learn how to reduce their stress and keep productivity up. This way you can avoid the negative results that stress can bring to your company and enable you employees to remain focused, motivated and productive.

You can't have good health without good emotional health and wellbeing. When you achieve good health and wellbeing, people work harder and are more productive. Looking after your work force's wellbeing is not a moral issue but is essential to achieve good levels of productivity and effectiveness.



Giselle Monbiot is a Stress Management Specialist helping individuals and organisations to maximise their potential through gaining clarity and practical insight with how to release stress and to achieve more. If you would like to learn more about the work she does with organisations to help increase productivity please take a look at her website www.gisellemonbiot.com to get further information.