



Course Director:  
Prof Manie Spoelstra



INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION ACADEMY  
*Negotiation: The Genesis of Management*



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## ARE YOU COPING WITH STRESS?

Many people nowadays feel extremely strained by **economic and other related pressures**. Constant bad news and personal setbacks and disappointments do not make the feelings of helplessness any easier. Stress, work, and **disappointments** seem to be inseparable of life. The reason for this is obvious: most of us experience at least some degree of stress in our jobs or at home. We are exposed to many different events and conditions that cause us to feel pressured or in danger of being pushed beyond our personal limits.

Many different factors cause stress in home, study, environment and work situations. Most, though, seem to fall into two major categories: causes relating to our **jobs** themselves, and causes relating to our 'personalities' and our **relationships**.

Most of us would be aware of the 'stress-counter' reported on by Greenberg\* and others. According to this counter, very few of us will not withstand a higher than 100 score on these ratings of the impact of various stressful life events on us!

Such stress could lead to **major psychological** and even **physical problems**. One probably even would need some form of counselling or medical treatment if your stress adds up to above 100 on the table below.

Imagine the **stress count of events affecting you personally** such as murder, hijacking, burglary, threats to your life, court cases, jail time, bankruptcy and other invasive events (which all rate 65 and above) that are often reported in the media.

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**TABLE: Stressful Life Events.\***

(Numbers to the right provide an index of relative Stressfulness; 100=maximum stress)

<b>Life Events</b>	<b>Scale Value (Range = 1-100)</b>
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Separation (Marital)	65
Death of close family member	63
Major personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Fired from job	47
Retirement	45
Death of close friend	37
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Trouble with in-laws	29
Spouse begins or stops work	26
Trouble with boss	23
Change in residence	20
Change in sleeping habits	15
Change in eating habits	15
Vacation	13
Christmas	12
Minor violations of the law	11

## **Causes of stress:**

### **1. Conflict between Work and Home**

Someone sometimes does his/her work so well (for example, [negotiating contracts](#) with suppliers), that they are given more and more assignments involving travelling. They are away from home and their families more and more often. **Loneliness and longing** often cause major stress in both parent and family members.

This often put increasing pressure on us to make some drastic changes, so as to be at home more often. We find ourselves being pulled in opposite directions by the needs and expectations of different forces: our families and our monthly income. The result is most often that we experience a considerable degree of **role conflict** and associated stress. The demands of our role as a rising young executive conflict sharply with the demands of our role as a spouse and parent.

Family ties are something of a **“two-edged sword.”** On the one hand they do often conflict with work assignments, but could also be an important source of comfort and support, being

assisted by someone in overcoming at least some of the harmful effects associated with stress.

## Work-related stressors

Which part of our jobs plays the most important role in us experiencing stress and strain? Greenberg and Baron (2002)\* elaborate on the **causes**, stating that the list is too long to do justice to it in a few pages. However, several of the most important of these factors are, according to the above authors:

### 1. Work demands: (Some jobs are more stressful than others)

A careful survey involving more than 130 different occupations indicate that several jobs have more stress than others\*.

For example, the greater the extent to which specific jobs require **decision-making and responsibility for perfect operation** of devices and/or materials, the need for continuous exchange of information with others, or **physical threatening conditions**, the more stressful they tend to be. It may be wise to considering stress-related factors of a new job offer and the level of **strain it will involve**, and your ability to handle such pressure. Given the powerful impact of stress upon our physical and mental well being it is probably wise to **look before you leap!**

### 2. Stress from uncertainty

This occurs when individuals are **uncertain** about several matters relating to their jobs and personal life: the scope of their responsibilities, the limits of their authority, specific production requirements, the criteria used in evaluating their work, relationship uncertain- ties, etc. We **hate virtually all forms of uncertainty** and experience varying degrees of stress.

### 3. Overload and underload: Doing too much or doing too little

Being asked to do too much (over demanding work) at work can be stressful. So too, is the opposite – being asked to do too little. In fact, there seems to be a considerable grain of truth in the following saying: “The hardest job in the world is doing nothing – you can’t take a break.” Such underload (or under- challenging) leads to **boredom and monotony**, and can cause significant amounts of stress. Japanese managers are known to punish unproductive workers by taking their **work away!**

The most desirable, and least stressful jobs seem to be ones that **keep you busy**, but do not cause you to feel that you will be unable to cope.

### 4. Having the destiny of others in your hands

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In general, individuals who are responsible for other people, e.g. motivate them, reward or punish them, and make decisions about them, often experience higher levels of stress than those who do other forms of work. In fact, they often experience **tension and anxiety**, and often even develop ulcers or experience **hypertension**. The reasons behind this are complex, but it is possibly related to the fact that they must witness the distress of persons who receive negative feedback because of them, and thus are passed over for promotion, or laid off, or even fired. It is also their task to deal **face to face** with the many **human conflicts** at work.

## 5. Stress from loneliness and isolation

If we have to face stressful conditions, it's better to do so along with others (and with their support) rather than alone. One reason for this is possibly that **social support often acts as a stress-buffer**. Another reason could be that others could help us, through verbal reflection, advice and their mere presence as well as ability to cope better when exposed to stress (perhaps the social media such as **facebook** do have some **anti-stress** benefits!).

## 6. The inability to be in control

Most persons want to feel that they have at least some control over their own fate. Thus, when they are prevented from offering input into decisions relating to them, they feel left out, and unable to control their own lives. This could cause considerable stress. Permitting employees to **participate in decisions affecting their jobs** may be quite beneficial. Not only does it enhance their attitudes towards their work; it helps counter a source of work-related stress as well.

## 8. Other work-related causes of stress

Stressful working conditions such as an unsanitary environment, unpleasant co-workers and/or managers, negative appraisals, **low pay**, dangerous tasks, loud noise, isolation or crowding, etc. can all act as stressors at work. Stress often also derives from **change** within an organization. Changes in company policy, **re-structuring, mergers**, and major changes in management can all generate high levels of pressure and stress among employees.

## Personal-related stressors

Stressful **life events** often result in people having to cope with difficult changes\*, which cause their personal health and well being to suffer (see Table above). It seems quite clear that the greater the number and intensity of stressful life events endured by an individual in a given period of time, the greater the likelihood of him/her developing serious illness. For example, persons who report life events totalling 150 to 300 points during one year, **have a 50 percent chance of becoming seriously ill** within the next twelve months. Those who experience events totalling more than 300 points have a 70 percent chance of these outcomes occurring.

Some unique people who are resistant to the trauma of stressful life events seem to **achieve more purpose and meaning** in their lives than those who are less capable of dealing with such trauma. Similarly, they believe that they can influence their own lives and its outcomes more than others; they see change as an opportunity for development rather than a threatening burden.

## The major effects of stress

### 1. Stress and Health: The Silent Killer

Prolonged exposure to stress can be harmful to one's health. Growing evidence (See Greenberg et al\*) indicates that stress plays a role in a wide range of common illnesses. In fact, many now believe that from 50 to 70 percent of all **physical illnesses are at least partly caused by stress!** In addition, stress appears to play a role in the following major health problems: high blood pressure, hardening of the arteries, ulcers, and diabetes. (Please note: this in no way implies that stress is the only cause, or the most important cause, of such ailments.)

## 2. Stress and Behaviour at work

Exposure to strong or prolonged stress exerts many effects upon behaviour in work settings. Performance on many tasks is in fact affected by stress, and such performance usually declines steeply when stress levels rise. In addition, stress is related to both **absenteeism and turnover**.

## 3. Alcohol, Drugs, and Stress

Stress is unpleasant. For this reason, most people seek to reduce or avoid it whenever possible. Some, however, adopt a divergent strategy. Instead of attempting to deal directly with stress, they seek to withdraw or escape from it. One of the major tactics these people use to accomplish this goal is simply to retreat into an **alcoholic or drug-dependent** state.

## 4. Burnout

Most people are exposed to some degree of stress in their work, yet still manage to cope. They avoid total panic, feelings of helplessness, and **despair**. A few, however, are not so lucky. They are gradually worn down (or worn out!) by stress. Over time they become **exhausted (burnout)**, grow cynical, and develop negative attitudes toward their work, other people, and life in general.

Imagine if you have experience two or more of these events at the same time. The maximum exceeds 100 and the effect can be **disastrous** to your ability to cope.

**Burnout** is normally seen as the **emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion** resulting from prolonged exposure to intense **stress**. People suffering from burnout have low energy, and are always tired. In addition, they often report many symptoms of physical strain, such as frequent **headaches**, nausea, back pain, sleep disturbances, and changes in eating habits. In sum, burnout represents what may best be described as an **erosion of the human spirit**. They feel incapable of accomplishing anything, have little concern for others, lack interest in virtually everything (including their own lives), and frequently feel fatigued, irritable, and depressed.

Burnout victims may choose to **quit their jobs and withdraw** from their present careers. The **loss to society** in terms of expertise, training, and talent can be great. Secondly, others may simply decide to stay at work, without leaving their careers. The danger, however, is that they will bring their **cynicism, exhaustion, and despair** with them, wherever they go, and so disrupt effectiveness. Thirdly, they may choose to move into purely administrative roles. In this way they escape from work activities they now find intolerable, so as to minimize their stress. Lastly, some may choose to remain on their jobs and mark time until retirement. In short, they may become "dead wood" – totally **counter-productive** members of the organization.

## Personal Tactics for Managing Stress

Fortunately, though, we can conclude on a more positive note. Burnout and stress does often mark the end of productive careers. Yet, if we recognize its presence and take appropriate steps to counter its influence, it **can be reversed**. Some of the actions are:

- **Admit** that there is a problem
- Change **priorities** and goals
- Establish a **network of social support**
- **Divide life** into work and social/family segments
- Cultivate **hobbies and outside interests**
- Develop yourself by **acquiring the skills to 'cope'**, e.g. [negotiation skills](#) and others.
- Focus on physical fitness, meditation exercises, religious activities and other “**stress tolerance**” activities.
- Consider **change of job** (if it is the right one, it could produce positive results.
- If you manage an organisation and would like to prevent negative stress in your employees or co-managers, you can often help by small **changes in organizational structure**, functions and jobs.
- Decentralizing of decision-making process (a process in which authority is spread more widely throughout an organization), employees can be afforded **greater participation**.
- Stress resulting from boring, repetitive tasks can be lessened through job enlargement, while from feelings of helplessness or lack of control can be reduced by **job enrichment**.
- The organization can **provide training** to employees that will both provide them with better **coping skills** while at the same time increase their negotiation, management, presentation, conflict-handling and interpersonal skills.

*Manie Spoelstra*

\*Reference: 2002, Greenberg, J & Baron, R A; Behavior in Organizations, 8th Ed. Prentice Hall, N.Y.