HOW DOES THE BANISH BURNOUT PROGRAM WORK?

By Janice Litvin, Wellness Speaker and Author

All twelve-step meetings end with the following prayer: *"God, give me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."*

Quite often when we overreact to stress, it is because we are frustrated with our lack of control.

Stress and burnout are more rampant than ever since the onslaught of the Corona Virus. But even before that, stress was already becoming an issue with 66% of Americans approaching burnout according to Gallup.

Those who fare best are the ones who accept the things that are not within their control. This means learning how to modulate our emotions so as not to overreact at every turn.

The easiest way to change our reactions is to first build awareness and then second, learn how to change our reactions, from the inside out.

Are you the kind of person who expends a lot of energy tearing her hair out every time something stressful happens?

I was that negative, complaining person who found something negative at every job. I grew up in a home where love was present but so were intense critical expectations. When a child is criticized repeatedly, they develop what is known as limiting beliefs, according to Dr. Elayne Savage, Practicing Psychotherapist and author of *Don't Take It Personally! The Art of Dealing with Rejection*. Limiting beliefs come from internalized reactions to constant criticism. For example:

You made all A's last semester. Why aren't you making all A's this semester?
That term paper is not perfect. Start over.
That dress does not work for you.

When a child receives these criticisms repeatedly, they believe them, then they internalize them and unconsciously convert them into internal messages, such as:

I'm not smart enough.
I'm not pretty enough.
I'm not good enough.

Those messages are carried forward into adulthood and undermine every endeavor until they are rooted out.

The best way I know to build awareness and begin to get your reactions to stress under control is to STOP and AUDIT.

STOP and AUDIT.
Let's start with S-T-O-P.

One of the easiest ways to make immediate changes to your behavior is to remember to S-T-O-P, which stands for:

Stop
Take a breath
Observe
Proceed

STOP is a very powerful method for immediate behavior change. Once you identify that you want to change your behavior, this approach works.

Here is how it works.
STOP, as the name suggests, gets you to sit up and notice what you are thinking, feeling, and doing.

Take a Breath, again as the name suggests, is about taking a very deep breath, which activates the parasympathetic nervous system to help you calm down.

Observe gets you to notice what you are thinking and/or how you are behaving. If you are stuck in overreaction, then that is where you can course-correct and move the reaction from the Amygdala, the fear center of the brain, to the pre-frontal cortex, the executive functioning part.

Proceed is where you make a decision about how you will behave in the moment.

STOP is the best way I have found to interrupt negative thoughts and turn your mood around from negative to positive.

STRESS AUDIT
The second part of this tool is the **Stress Audit**, whose purpose is to uncover and focus on possible pent-up feelings in reaction to something that has happened, a stressor or incident of some sort. It could stem from something small, such as being on hold too long for technical support, or something big, like a major disagreement or disappointment at work.

It is important to note that pushing down and ignoring feelings leads to emotional outbursts later. So the value of the Stress Audit is to give your feelings a place to release.

The Stress Audit is fairly easy to complete. You simply ask yourself, "How am I feeling right now in this moment?" as soon as you can after a stressful incident. Here is how it works. Ask yourself the following questions:
What happened? Disagreement at work.

How did I feel physically? Tight jaw, neck, or shoulders, knots in the stomach, headache, elevated heart rate, or shallow breathing?

How do I feel emotionally? Anger, frustration, resentment, or sadness, etc.

What did I say? Argued, complained, etc.

How upset did I get and how long did I stay there? I was so upset I couldn't think straight or do my work.

The key to managing stress and banishing burnout is to change your behavior. And the first step to any behavior change is building awareness. You cannot make any change without it. STOP and the Stress Audit are tools to help you build the awareness you need in order to recognize your intense responses to stress and then to adopt healthier coping strategies.

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