Stretched to the Limit
(How to Manage Workplace Stress)
By Speaker/ Mike Moore

You know you're stressed out when...

you have a constant desire to exercise

one specific finger over all others.

Stretched to the Limit

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Introduction

Stress in the Workplace

If there is one area that needs to manage stress more effectively it’s the workplace. In my work as a speaker to business managers and to staffs I frequently get asked to address the issues of burnout and stress. It seems to be an a very important and relevant at this moment in time.

I am under no illusion that my efforts will immediately solve the stress problems faced by businesses throughout the world but I am convinced that if we start implementing the ideas in this e-book great things can happen that will not only manage stress but also improve morale and promote employment enjoyment in workplaces everywhere.

So my friends I would like to share with you ideas that work based on my belief and experience that relaxation and laughter can do wonders to enhance the quality of any workplace by restoring balance, serenity and joy to its members.

I constantly tell people to apply my HA principle on and off the job. My HA principle involves the cultivation of a Humor Oriented Lifestyle and a Positive Mental Attitude. Both go a long way in making your life and career more joyful and tranquil.

When there is nothing more you can do about some of the things that happen to you in your workplace relationships you still have total control over your attitude towards them and your sense of humor. Use both to foster healing and professional well being.
How I Got Interested in Managing Workplace Stress with Humor and Relaxation

When I was a young man starting out I worried a lot. I fretted about everything and I thought I had every disease known to medical science. I recall being afraid to get married. I loved Carol and wanted to spend my life with her, but what if something happened to her and I was left alone. Worse still what if we had children and something terrible happened to Carol and the children? Wouldn’t it be better to avoid these terrible possibilities by remaining single? You can see that my life was ruled by fear of the “what ifs” of life. Something had to change and only I could change it.

I began researching and reading everything I could get my hands on in the area of personal growth and stress management. The first book I read was Norman Vincent Peale’s “The Power of Positive Thinking” This wonderful little paperback lit the flame and I followed up with “How to Stop Worrying and Start Living” by Dale Carnegie and Psycho Cybernetics by M. Maltz. These three books were my launching pad so to speak. With them I ventured forth and the results have been dramatic. The list of helpful books and tapes has grown exponentially with time. And even though I don’t read them as faithfully as I once did they are always close by to call on for a super charge once in awhile.

One thing I have to emphasize is that you can read all the books in the world on the subject of change and stress management and nothing will happen unless you apply what you learned. I committed 30 minutes a day to practising what I had learned and I was faithful to this time slot. To this day I cherish my relaxation time and when I miss a day or two my wife can notice the difference. I can always count on hearing “Mike have you been relaxing lately?” This actually means, “You’re starting to get uptight so get back to it NOW!”

I happen to be a type A personality. This makes me a very energetic and enthusiastic speaker and I value this. But I am not speaking 24 hours a day, seven days a week and I don’t want to go through life in constant passing gear. So I need a mechanism by which I can slow down, stay calm and enjoy the journey. This I have discovered through progressive relaxation and humour.
Recently I was sitting around a campfire with friends when someone asked how I can go around Canada and the USA speaking on stress management through humour and relaxation when I am not always stress free myself. This remark indicates a gross misunderstanding about the teaching-learning process. I believe that we teach what we most desperately need to learn. That’s why I write and speak on stress management. My life long struggle to control stress and remain calm in a rather insane and frenetic world has taught me a great deal and I want to share my discoveries with people who are experiencing a similar problem with stress. I haven’t mastered the process but I certainly have come a long way and have learned a lot. I have a lot to share.

If we all waited until we were perfect before we shared our information on any subject no one would ever share anything with anyone. We are all works in progress. While I am not interested in achieving perfection I am very interested in making progress. This is what is really important. Perfection is boring, tedious and can become obsessive. Perfectionists are often a pain to be around and live with anyway.

**Managing Stress Not Eliminating It**

It is important to remember that we are talking about managing stress and not about eliminating it from our lives. If stress were not a part of our lives we would be dead. Living involves stress. It’s unmanaged stress that can destroy our health and well being and which must be controlled.

**The Role Of Laughter In Stress Management**

As many of you know I am totally committed to humor as a way of life. I not only speak throughout North America on Humor in the Workplace and Humor and Health but I also draw and sell cartoons and write books on the subject. You could say that laughter is my life.
Laughter is a gift that keeps on giving in so many ways. It lowers blood pressure, cuts stress in half, and increases the oxygen in our blood giving us more energy. When these benefits are combined with the many social benefits of humor and laughter we can easily conclude that investing in humor and laughter is a great thing to do. The returns on our investment are fantastic.

**Laughter in Stress Management**

If humor and laughter cut stress in half then they should be a vital part of any stress management program. When you add simple relaxation exercises to the equation you are really on the road to successful stress management. Some people say that they just don’t have time to relax daily yet they seem to have time to watch a favorite TV program. If you are one of those who can’t find time for relaxation in your schedule hopefully you can find time to laugh. If you can’t you are really in trouble.

**My Stress Management Program**

In this manual you will find both approaches to stress management with a heavy emphasis on humor and laughter. Remember that when you look at one of my cartoons and respond to it with laughter you are cutting your stress level in half with your laughter alone. Laughter also eliminates worry from your life, at least for the duration of the laughter. You can’t worry when you’re laughing. Laughter also reduces any physical pain you might be experiencing through the process of distraction alone.

**How to Get the Most From this Manual**

Read it. Study it. Enjoy it. Apply what it teaches. Let your laughter ring out for all to hear and respond to.

It is my hope that you enjoy and benefit from the strategies and suggestions in “Stretched to the Limit”
Thoughts About Stress

* Stress is the number one problem facing people today.

* The World Health Organization says that by the year 2020 depression will be the leading cause of disability.

* 50% of all Long Term Disability claims are stress related.

* According to a Canadian government survey we, as a society, spend 32 billion dollars a year on mental illness. In the U.S.A. it is much more than this.

* 43% of people surveyed say that they hate their job.

* A British study has found that your health is seriously effected by the quality of your relationship with your manager/supervisor/department head. Those who have a poor relationship with their supervisors tend to have high blood pressure and high stress levels.

* New research links stress to disease.

**Damaging effects of stress: (Toronto Star April 2004)**

1. Stress damages the brain and can impair memory function

2. Stress raises blood pressure and stimulates the production of inflammatory hormones which contribute to the build-up of plaque in the arteries.

3. Stress can trigger pain, gas and other symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome. It also aggravates stomach ulcers.

4. Stress can aggravate painful joints.

**To be healthy, put the brakes on Stress**
Unmanaged stress is one of the biggest problems facing the corporate world throughout North America today.

* Unmanaged stress is a 300 billion dollar profit killer.

* Between $2700 and $7500 per employee per year is spent on dealing with the effects of workplace stress.

* Stats on stress costs:
  
  * 19% of absentees are due to stress
  
  * 40% of turnovers
  
  * 35% of employee assistance programs
  
  * 30% of short and long term disability
  
  * 10% of drug plan costs
  
  * 60% of workplace accidents including workers’ compensation and losses

Ron Ball (www.eustress.net)

According to author Ravi Tangri companies could boost profits 14% per year by dealing with workplace stress. Stress management programs pay for themselves in six months.
10 WAYS TO RELAX DURING YOUR BUSY DAY By Mike Moore

1. Take three deep breaths slowly. It really works to relax the body and mind.

2. Relax the tongue. Usually the tongue is held tightly against the teeth. Free it up in the mouth so it can just rest there without tension.

3. Take one minute vacations. In your mind visit places where you find peace and stillness. Picture yourself there soaking up the beauty and solitude.

4. Relax your facial muscles. When we are tense we frown and squint which adds to the tension. Tell your facial muscles to relax and they will. Try to maintain this relaxed face throughout the day.

5. Move slowly. When you find yourself rushing for no reason, SLOW DOWN.


7. Listen to beautiful music. Mozart calms the restless spirit.

8. Watch and enjoy the sunset.

9. Visualize yourself as a balloon being inflated. As you breathe in, the balloon fills with your stress and tension. Then breathe out all the stress and tension leaving yourself limp and relaxed.

10. Enjoy the rhythm and beauty of nature for its lessons are patience and peace.

REMEMBER THAT RECREATION ISN'T RELAXATION, IT'S DIVERSION.

LIVE BETTER.......LAUGH MORE
Much of our stress comes from the fact that people refuse to play the game of life according to our rule book.

Worry is like a rocking chair....

It will give you something to do, but it won’t get you anywhere.

Most of what we worry about will never happen.
The Healing Power of Laughter

Laughter isn't just fun and enjoyable, it's good for our health. Each month modern medicine is discovering more about the therapeutic dimension of humour and laughter and is encouraging us to add them to our wellness program,

The Health Benefits of Laughter

When we laugh we...

* lower our blood pressure.
* promote relaxation and reduce stress.
* increase the oxygen level in our blood giving us more energy.
* increase the endorphin activity in our body resulting in a sense of well being.
* are able to keep things in perspective
* banish boredom
* are more socially attractive. People enjoy being with those who laugh easily and often.
* increase our enjoyment of life.

Laughter has been called social glue because it bonds us to the people we laugh with.

If it feels good to laugh then laugh to feel good.

This is an excerpt from Mike Moore's latest book Light Up With Laughter available at http://motivationalplus.com/cgi/a/t.cgi?light
DO YOU MANAGE STRESS EFFECTIVELY?

Place a checkmark beside each statement that applies to you

DO YOU...

* give yourself time to avoid rushing? _____

* go through the day at a comfortable pace? _____

* enjoy taking the scenic route to work even though it’s longer? _____

* do things for the sheer joy of doing them? ____

* avoid getting upset at the shortcomings of others? _____

* enjoy relationships for their own sake? _____

* feel confident standing up for yourself? ______

* accept people for who and what they are? ______

* feel reasonably satisfied with yourself? ______

* accept that which you cannot change? ______

The greater the number of checkmarks the more effectively you manage stress.

The staff that laughs together lasts together.

11.
A Prescription for Wellness

The vast majority of the workshops I am asked to conduct throughout Canada and the U.S.A. have to do with humor and wellness. It is quite obvious to me that a huge number of people in education, business, the professions and in private life are unwell and want to do something to improve the situation.

There was a survey done here in Canada within the past year, the results of which were interesting. There was an overwhelming consensus, among those surveyed, that stress was the leading cause of their unwellness. When polled as to the source of their stress 14 percent said, their children, 22 percent said, finances and 45 percent indicated, their work. What was more disturbing was the fact that 10 percent of those surveyed admitted to considering doing physical harm to their supervisors. 25 percent of respondents agreed that stress is having a serious negative impact on their sex life.

When you analyse the results of this survey with an awareness of the fact that depression, anxiety, worry and fear are plaguing people everywhere we see a serious need for wellness.

Let me briefly outline the basics of wellness for you with the encouragement to commit yourself to creating your own individual program. The important word here is commitment. Do it and stick to it!

* Humor:*

Learn to laugh...A LOT! The physical and psycho-social benefits of laughter are clear. Live better, laugh more. Laughter, if not the best medicine, is certainly very good medicine.
* Attitude:
Behaviour is attitude in action. Positive attitudes result in positive behaviour while negative attitudes result in negative behaviour. When you change your attitude, you can change your life. Develop positive attitudes and you begin to live in the brilliance of the healthy emotions they produce.

* Relaxation:
Learn the restorative art of positive relaxation. Make time each day to rest your mind and body completely for, at least, 20 minutes. You can relax sitting in a chair or lying down. Just do it. You begin by closing your eyes and taking three, deep, slow breaths. As your exhale feel and visualize your body and mind letting go and peace and tranquillity rushing in and dwelling within you.

* Exercise:
Get moving, physically. Start by going for a walk. Gradually increase the time, distance and speed of your walk. I like the old saying, “In the morning work awhile. In the afternoon rest awhile and after dinner walk a mile.” Walking has been called nature’s tranquillizer for good reason. Great things happen when we go for a walk. As your fitness improves you might want to include other exercises. This is fine, providing you check it out with your family doctor first.

Diet:
People in North America today are overfed, undernourished and overweight. We consume far too much sugar, fat, and empty carbohydrates. When you combine this with increased stress and lack of exercise it becomes clear why we aren’t well. Something as simple as cutting down on non-nourishing foods and increasing the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables we consume can be a good first step towards wellness. At present, I am trying to eat three nourishing meals a day and that’s it. If I do get the urge for a snack I am trying to make it fruit. Notice I use the word trying. When I fail I don’t beat myself up, I just start trying all over again. It is important to be moving in the direction of wellness.
In your entire wellness program remember that it isn’t perfection that we are trying to achieve, it’s improvement. We don’t want to become so fixated on wellness that our quest for wellnes becomes a health problem.

If you want to learn how to relax spend some time with a cat.
TEN TERRIFIC SELF-MOTIVATING TIPS

Managing your stress requires self motivation. Here are a few tips to help in that department

No one can motivate anyone to do anything. All a person can do for another is provide them with incentives to motivate themselves. Here are ten very effective strategies to help you get up and get moving toward actualizing your enormous, untapped potential.

* Be willing to leave your comfort zone. The greatest barrier to achieving your potential is your comfort zone. Great things happen when you make friends with your discomfort zone.

* Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Wisdom helps us avoid making mistakes and comes from making a million of them.

* Don't indulge in self-limiting thinking. Think empowering, expansive thoughts.

* Choose to be happy. Happy people are easily motivated. Happiness is your birthright so don't settle for anything else.

* Spend at least one hour a day in self-development. Read good books or listen to inspiring tapes. Driving to and from work provides an excellent opportunity to listen to self-improvement tapes.

* Train yourself to finish what you start. So many of us become scattered as we try to accomplish a task. Finish one task before you begin another.

* Live fully in the present moment. When you live in the past or the future you aren't able to make things happen in the present.
* Commit yourself to joy. C.S. Lewis once said, "Joy is the serious business of heaven."

* Never quit when you experience a setback or frustration. Success could be just around the corner.

* Dare to dream big dreams. If there is anything to the law of expectation then we are moving in the direction of our dreams, goals and expectations.

The real tragedy in life is not in how much we suffer, but rather in how much we miss, so don't miss a thing.

Charles Dubois once said, "We must be prepared, at any moment, to sacrifice who we are for who we are capable of becoming."

View a 5 minute video on Stress and Humor
http://motivationalplus.com/cgi/a/t.cgi?video

Do This and Really Start Living

I have come to the conclusion that there are far too many people living lives of drudgery. Whenever I speak I meet nice people many of whom have simply given up on life. Not that they want to end it. They just find life such a heavy burden. They tell me sad stories of their pain and disillusionment; stories that are filled with negative self talk, sadness and rejection. It reminds me of what George Bernard Shaw once said, “Some people should have inscribed on their tombstone, “Died at 30. Buried at 82.” I agree with Sam Butler when he says that our main task in life is to enjoy it.
Life is short and we only go around once so I want to make sure that my life is a joyful, fun experience in spite of the inevitable pain and suffering. Here are a few suggestions I use to bring joy, laughter and peace to my life. I hope they do for you what they have done for me. Remember that the key to making them work is commitment to their application.

**Ways to Thrive, Not Just Survive**

* Commit yourself to putting the fun back into your life. Whatever it is that’s fun for you do it, and do it often.

* Laugh more. Become a laughologist. Watch funny movies and sit coms, Collect and display funny cartoons. Isn’t that what a refrigerator door is for? Hang out with humourous people. Frequent the humour section of your public library. LIVE BETTER, LAUGH MORE

* Develop a strong sense of E.S.P. (The Enjoyment of Simple Pleasures) Life is full of simple pleasures if we would only slow down and look for them. Just last night I stood at the front window overlooking the golf course and watched a full autumn moon rise in the eastern sky. I stood in silence taking in the awesome beauty of a moonlit night. I was filled with peace, stillness and an overwhelming sense of joy. A perfect example of E.S.P.

* Go for a brisk walk in nature. You will feel good and you will put yourself in touch with your lost sense of wonder. There is nothing that lifts my drooping spirits faster than a nature walk.

* Reach out and help someone. I believe that we are never more fully alive than when we reach out to help another human being. True happiness comes from investing your energy in caring for others and creation.

**DO THIS AND REALLY START LIVING.**

17.
THE VALUE OF HUMOUR IN OUR LIVES

It is impossible to worry while you're laughing.

Humour cuts stress levels in half.

Humour helps us cope, conquer, and carry on.

Train yourself to look for the comedy in your chaos.

When we feel like laughing the least, we need it most.

The best exercise is jumping for joy.

Laughing helps you to stay happy and healthy and helps you return to good health when ill.

Laughter increases, by 20%, the activity of killer cells within the body which serve to destroy viruses and tumour cells.

A sense of humour is the number one survival skill.

George Bernard Shaw once said, "When you find something funny search it for hidden truth."

"The art of medicine consists of amusing the patient while nature cures the disease." Voltaire

We begin to solve our problems when we begin to see the humour in them.
A good laugh is not only the result of humor, it is often also the cause.

The body heals with play; the mind heals with laughter and the spirit heals with joy.

The Art of Simple Meditation

What is Meditation?

Meditation is an ancient method of achieving tranquillity and peace of mind. It involves dwelling on a sound, phrase or image exclusively.

What are the Benefits of Meditation?

Meditation increases your awareness, promotes serenity, relieves stress and helps you cope with the problems of life. It has also been shown to lower blood pressure and help overcome insomnia.

Note: Recent research has shown that meditation is extremely effective in controlling pain.

How Do You Meditate?

Sit in a comfortable chair or lie down on the floor or bed. (I prefer to sit as I have a tendency to fall asleep when lying down.)
Select your focus (sound, phrase or image). Your image can be a flame, flower, quiet beach etc. It is your choice. Some people prefer to concentrate on their breathing. Remember it’s the process of focussing not the object of your focus that is important.

Close your eyes and begin to hold your focus. Distractions will come. Let them. Don’t try to resist their presence just visualize them leaving your mind and then return to your focus.

Meditate for just a few minutes in the beginning gradually increasing the time to 15 or 20 minutes. Frequently I find myself meditating 30 to 40 minutes at a time. When you’re meditating the time just flies by.

**How Will You Know You Are Meditating?**

You will have a deep feeling of peace, detachment, relaxation and tranquillity.
How to Develop a Happy and Healthy Workplace
(What every manager and supervisor should know)

* Your staff withholds 2/3 of what they are capable of contributing to your educational community in the form of talents, skills, experience, information and ideas. Apparently this is due to the fact that they don’t feel appreciated.

* Workers can't help but be indifferent and apathetic when they are pursuing someone else's objectives. Ownership is the key to school success and constructive change.

* Trust your people with sensitive information. This doesn't mean you share everything with them. It does mean that you keep them informed about what is going on and how it will effect them.

* Give your staff meaningful input into destiny decisions.

* If you are ever going to maximize your staff potential, you must do everything in your power to maximize human potential.

* The health and well being of your employees are your main concern. When you solve people problems, staff morale is bound to improve.

* The chief task of a leader is to restore and maintain optimism, enthusiasm and morale.

* If your business mission statement is to be credible and relevant, its vision and values must be more than a framed statement on the wall. There must be a constant challenge to become what you collectively say you are.
* As a manager or supervisor, who tells you, honestly and openly what you need to know, but don't want to hear? If the answer is "No one" you are in trouble and so is your school or department.

* If there is a problem ask for solutions. Listen carefully, apply the suggestions given and suspend your own judgment. You will be surprised how quickly and effectively the problem gets solved without your dominant input.

* If people are your greatest resource, then your attitude and behaviour must show it.

* Treat the people you work with the way you want to be treated.

* Mark Twain said that he could live contented for two months on one compliment. Compliment generously and genuinely.

* Never take credit for another's idea.

* Never give out, "YOU ARE SPECIAL" buttons in an attempt to improve morale.

* Encourage the people you lead to ask, "WHY" questions. Don't be threatened by them.

* For more information on this topic ask about Mike's newest manual Humour in the Workplace (Using humour, appreciation and praise to promote a happy, productive workplace) email mikemoore@motivationalplus.com
The Humor Journal

I encourage all employees to keep a journal in which they can record all the humorous things that happen throughout each day. I believe that each worker could fill a book with the humorous happenings over the course of a career. I am one of them. I have on file over 400 funny stories that I have accumulated over 35 years of teaching. I use them in my talks and seminars and in my books but you can just write them down and enjoy them over and over and reap the many benefits of the humor they provide. The laughter they evoke and the pleasure they give you will both go a long way to help you cope with a highly stressful job.

Start today to keep a journal. Have it always on your desk or in your briefcase so it’s handy to record the stories when they come.

For more information on becoming a humor hound check out “Light Up With Laughter” [http://www.motivationalplus.com/light.html](http://www.motivationalplus.com/light.html)

Take a look at Mike’s Pick Your Own Cartoon site. [http://motivationalplus.com/cgi/a/t.cgi?pickyourown](http://motivationalplus.com/cgi/a/t.cgi?pickyourown)
YOU’VE GOT TO LAUGH
Cartoons for and About Employees

If laughter cuts stress in half then start laughing.
Mike’s Laughline Cartoons

To tell the truth I am having one helluva time letting go of the "It's my way or the highway paradigm."

http://www.motivationalplus.com
Mike’s Laughline Cartoons

I DON'T WANT TO INTERFACE, DAMNIT, I WANT TO TALK!

COMPUTER DEPT.

http://www.motivationalplus.com
For a free copy of my cartoon ebook “Let the Laughter Begin” (17 workplace cartoons) visit http://motivationalplus.com/cgi/a/t.cgi?begin
Our attitudes in life are frequently the chains that bind us.

http://www.motivationalplus.com
Interesting Links

Free monthly newsletter Mike’s Lifeline (Give you life a lift and a laugh)
sendlifeline@sendfree.com

Receive notification whenever a new cartoon is posted online
cartoons@sendfree.com

Interested in putting your knowledge and skills to work outside the workplace for fantastic fees? http://www.speakforprofit.com

This is one publication you don’t want to be without.
http://www.motivationalplus.com/Cope_work_but.html
Mike Moore is an international speaker and humorist who speaks to business and professional groups throughout Canada and the United States on Managing Stress, The Humor and Health Connection and Maximizing Staff Potential Using Humor and Recognition.

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