

**Seven Strategies to Reduce Stress
and Increase Focus
in the Workplace**



By: Bonnie Artman Fox

LMFT, RN, CADC

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All workplaces experience some degree of stress. The work itself can be demanding, deadlines loom and tempers sometimes flare. Left unattended to, stress can have a long-term impact on productivity, turnover and profitability. As stress increases, people dread going to work and when they are there, they're distracted and unproductive.

Yes, certain work conditions can trigger stress. However, stress starts with us. That is, our reactions to stressful situations can make things only more stressful. Although you can't control what happens, you can control how you respond.

By taking responsibility for how you respond to stress you can make a difference in your work setting. When you feel calmer, you are more apt to positively influence your team morale as well as the focus, productivity, and bottom line of your organization.

Stress vs. Mindfulness

You might say that stress is an unconscious response to certain situations and circumstances. Mindfulness is a conscious response to the same external triggers. It is paying attention to the present moment, focusing on what you are doing while you are doing it. Through this awareness, you're able to pause, consider what is happening and then make a conscious choice in how you respond.

This article outlines seven key Strategies you can practice to reduce stress in your workplace through the principles of

Mindfulness. The Strategies offer shifts in your mindset that can change how you view the stress you encounter in your work day. By following these Strategies, you can change your mindset and influence those you work with at the same time. The result is less stress, more productivity within a more collaborative work environment. And that equals higher profits.

Mindfulness Strategies based on Research

These Strategies are based on Jon Kabat Zinn's seven principles of mindfulness developed at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.*

All of the Strategies in this article are simple, yet take practice in order to respond more deliberately when in the middle of a stressful situation.

Read through this article completely and then come back to the first Strategy and try practicing it for a day. Then on day two, practice the second Strategy for a day. Repeat until you have gone through all seven Strategies with a full day of intentionality. The aim of these Strategies is to bring more awareness to the situations you encounter in order to reduce stress and improve focus in the workplace.

1. Shifting from Judgment to Non-judgment

We often don't realize how much judgment seeps into our thoughts. Unconsciously, we judge people from the way they dress to their level of education. We often make negative judgments based on our perceptions, and not on people's capabilities. Even as we become aware of this tendency, it's hard not to be judgmental.

But how can we interact with another human being effectively when we are being judgmental? Just think how you feel when you are being judged! All it does is make you resistant and resentful because judgmental attitudes and behaviors will only lead to more stress and lower productivity.

Strategy #1 – Practice noticing the tendency to label or categorize people or events.

How Non-judging can reduce stress: The act of judging automatically increases stress. The thing that you'll gain from this first Strategy is by increasing your awareness of being judgmental you'll find yourself judging less. You'll start seeing others in a different light and will be more open to them.

2. Shifting from Assumptions to Curiosity

Have you ever looked at a person and not really seen them? Or perhaps you have been part of a conversation, but you aren't really listening? You look like you are attentive, nodding your head or giving appropriate "um hums". You think you know what the person is saying because you've had the same conversation many times before, but you don't.

A career Nurse in one of my mindfulness classes shared that one day she looked at her husband and asked him when he shaved off his mustache. "Two months ago", he replied. Sometimes we only see through our own thoughts and perceptions, and we miss what's happening around us.

Strategy #2 – Practice approaching your staff with a curiosity as if you are seeing them or hearing about a problem they are facing for the very first time.

How Curiosity can reduce stress: When we are curious, we are more likely to gain new understandings that spark innovation and better decisions. It invites critical thinking that can invigorate your team to become more collaborative and in turn more enthusiastic about their work.

3. Shifting from Achieving to Non-striving

Have you wanted a particular outcome? Perhaps you have a particular sales goal you want to reach or an expectation of where you should be at this stage of your life? Perhaps you have a problem employee who you expect to be more dedicated and thorough in his or her work?

When we are non-striving, we notice the desire of how we want things to be and release the effort to reach a certain place. Society says, "Try harder, work longer hours, and keep your phone by your side at all times". This third Strategy takes away the urge to force something to happen. As an example, if you have ever been in flight and the ride is bumpy, there isn't anything you can do about it. This Strategy helps you to shift from focusing on the turbulence and wanting it to stop to staying in the present. If you focus on what's in front of you such as the tray table or your hands, you are detaching from the result you want (turbulence to stop) to seeing and accepting things as they are.

Strategy #3 – Practice noticing thoughts that focus on results and the urge to make things a certain way.

How Non-striving can reduce stress. Most stress is driven by dwelling on our expectations. Non-striving reminds us that no matter how hard we try, we often can't "make" something

happen. Even if what we wanted to happen happens, it may not be as effective or as good of an outcome if we hadn't forced it.

4. Shifting from Anguish to Acceptance

Do you have difficulty sleeping because of the problems you are facing at work? Perhaps your tendency is to minimize problems such as the tension between staff members as "not really that bad". They just need to grow up and learn how to get along. After all, you are their boss, not their parent or therapist!

Seeing things as they actually are, especially when we play a part in what's happening can be uncomfortable. When we redirect our focus from the turmoil of wanting things to be different to acceptance, a shift begins to happen. It doesn't mean we have to like what's happening and it certainly is not a resignation to do nothing. It is simply coming to terms with how things really are at this moment.

Strategy #4 – Practice seeing a difficult situation for what it is and accepting this is how it is right now. Notice what happens within you as you acknowledge this.

How Acceptance can reduce stress: Acceptance allows us to know what we are dealing with so we can develop a plan of action. It's been said "what we resist, persists". Acceptance helps us embrace reality in order to move on with dignity.

5. Shifting from Holding on to Letting Go

Closely related to Acceptance is Letting Go. It is human nature to want things to be a certain way, more accurately "our" way. If you notice that your mind has a constant chatter and you have difficulty relaxing or falling asleep at night, it is a classic sign of stress.

The practice of Letting Go is when we notice an attachment to how we want things to be, to release our expectations and accept things as they are. It is in the releasing that paradoxically we are able to receive, often times something far better than what we were holding onto.

Strategy #5 – Practice noticing and Letting Go of thoughts, feelings, and situations that you tend to hold on to.

How Letting Go can reduce stress: Allowing yourself to loosen your grip to the comfort and familiarity of whatever you are holding onto, opens up the possibilities of what can be. And it might even improve your sleep!

6. Shifting from Doubt to Trust

Learning to Trust yourself can be difficult if you are used to being in busy mode. When in busy mode, you are not used to paying attention to the promptings from your intuition. Research shows that the neural circuitry in the body gives us clues through either a gut reaction or other bodily sensation that something isn't right.

As a Marriage & Family Therapist, many times my clients told me that either before an affair was disclosed or proof that their child was using drugs, they knew something was wrong. They just didn't know what was wrong.

Strategy #6 – Practice noticing and Trusting the inner promptings you receive from within...the sense that something is off.

How Trust can reduce stress. By developing Trust in yourself you are more likely to make conscious, well thought out choices instead of reacting out of impulse.

7. Shifting from Impatience to Patience

All of the practices we've discussed to this point rest on the practice of Patience. Allowing people, circumstances, and outcomes to unfold in their own time is difficult, especially if you have knowledge of how something could be harmful.

However, if people or events are forced to be a certain way, the growth is halted. The analogy of the transformation of the moth to the butterfly from inside the chrysalis is a beautiful example of allowing things to emerge in their own time.

Strategy #7 – Practice Patience in allowing a difficult employee to learn through a natural consequence.

How Patience can reduce stress: Patience invites slowing down and being present to your life. The benefits are decreased blood pressure, relaxation, improved relationships, and ultimately feeling better!

Integrating These Strategies

We recognize these Strategies are easier said than done. In order to receive the most impact, it is most beneficial if you integrate the practices as a daily part of your life one at a time.

By bringing more awareness into the moments of your day, you will be more likely to manage stress better, be more focused, and an influential leader. Over time, the ripple effect is a team that collaborates which improves productivity and the organization's bottom line.

We can help you improve your work environment and enhance your leadership that contributes to your bottom line! Contact Bonnie at Bonnie@AConscious.com or 412.877.8331 to discuss how your organization

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could benefit from training and coaching for more focus, less stress, and bigger profits. Bonnie offers a complimentary “Bottom Line Strategy Session” to discuss your organization’s situation, goals and challenges.

You can visit her website at www.AConscious.com

About Bonnie Artman Fox



Bonnie Artman Fox is a licensed therapist and Professional Speaker who has over twenty years in the healthcare and psychology fields. She helps Business Leaders, HR Professionals, and Small Business Owners transform conflict into collaboration. She specializes in teaching communication skills to deal with difficult people and situations in the workplace. If you would like to learn how to improve your work environment and bottom line results, contact Bonnie at 412.877.8331 or Bonnie@AConscious.com.