

# CONNECTIONS

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## Take My Stress PLEASE!

FEI Workforce Resilience

With the power to relieve stress, reduce anxiety and increase mental energy, laughter really is a darn good medicine. But we know that, right? Who hasn't tried to use humor to soften an adversary, calm an upset friend, or break the ice at a big event? But looking at the funny side is more than a crisis tool. Stress expert Loretta LaRoche sees it as a daily way of life. Behavioral Health Newsline explored her unique take on stress management in this Q&A.

### Is there a difference between good stress and bad stress?

Oh yes. You need stress. It helps you manage your life and propels you to be successful. It even designates what is dangerous and what is not. That's why we have a fight-or-flight response. Because if you're on the highway and a car goes into your lane, you better well have a stress response.

### So when does good stress become bad stress? When does it cross that line?

Think of the circus performer with the plates twirling on sticks. There comes a point when he's twirling too many plates and they start dropping. Or think of an instrument like a Stradivarius. When the strings are the right tension, it plays beautifully. But when they get too tight, you get a squeaky sound. The human body responds the same way. When it starts to feel overloaded, it starts to give you signals. You start to get physical responses. You may get heart palpitations or headaches, backaches and gastrointestinal problems. In other words, nothing seems to make you feel good. You start to feel irritable, you overreact.

### And this is where stress management comes in. How can we manage our stress if we all need it?

One has to really be aware of his or her bodily responses. I think the problem is that sometimes people have actually forgotten what it means to be well; having a feeling of wellness. It's where you don't have aches and pains, you're able to get through the day with a lot of energy and you're getting good sleep. When you start to get the other signals, you have to step aside and say to yourself: "It seems to me like I'm out of control."

### You believe humor is a major part of managing stress, but how can people who aren't as naturally funny as you bring humor into their lives?

When I say humor, I mean that humor as a kind of umbrella to hold over yourself to live a lighthearted life. You don't have to be a comedian. It's about putting on



Hello City Employees!

April is stress awareness month, and few things relieve my own stress better than warming weather, planning my garden, spring cleaning, and reducing clutter. When we think of wellness, we often think of physical wellness first, but wellness is so much more. Wellness is physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, occupational, social, environmental, cultural, individual and collective. This newsletter will include ways to combat stress, but also provide information on often unlooked areas of stress relief like spring cleaning.

We also wanted to include information on how to embrace being an introvert (or working with them), and we have included book recommendations that employees have shared with us that have increased their own wellness, and perhaps could be of benefit to you as well. Thank you to those who submitted their book recommendations, and please feel free to continue to share books, music, film, tips, or ideas that have contributed to your own wellbeing!

Peace and All Good,



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a lighter lens to see life with more clarity, rather than through a dark lens, which leads to feeling like you're in a vampire movie. So forget the comedy or being funny. What you really want to do is to take your life more lightly instead of seriously. Take your work seriously, take your life lightly.

### Have you seen people do that successfully?

Oh yes. I think you see it once someone recognizes that life is not a stress rehearsal. You have to recognize that you are not immortal. You are not going to be here forever. What do you want to do with the time that you have? Do you want to spend eight hours of every day complaining, moaning and gathering forces around you to feel like a victim? Or do you want to take that time and make your day more joyful, more flexible, and easier on yourself and everyone around you?

### You tell people that too often we make everything into catastrophes, that a wet towel on the bed is not a mugging.

I think one of the best ways to deal with this is to take five things that you feel are the worst possible things that could ever happen to you or your family and use those to put other things that stress you out in perspective.

### So how do people put that kind of perspective on things?

Put that list of five things on your desk. And take a look at them periodically when you're getting stressed and say, "Wow, this really isn't as important as I think it is." Because I always say yesterday's tragedy turns into today's comedy. How many of us have laughed over some incident that we initially thought was just so incredibly dramatic?

### Why does life seem more stressful these days?

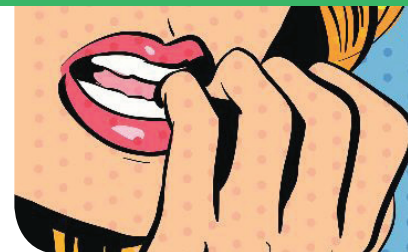
The fact that technology is created and obliterated so quickly creates a lot of stress. I learn a program and then I'm told six months later we are replacing that with a different program. Never before in history have we discovered and rediscovered things so quickly. I don't want to sound like I don't think we should move forward—we are never going to go back to my grandmother's time. But I think we have to blend the two. In the studies on stress, one constant appears over and over again. And that is without support from friends or families or coworkers—social support—you will become ill and die sooner. And loneliness and depression are at an all-time high in this society.

## How Stressed Are You?

Researchers agree that the cumulative effects of stressful situations in your life are detrimental to your health. Though it was created in 1967, the **Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale** is still used to assess whether your stress level is likely to make you ill. If you feel that your stress level is higher than it should be and you need some effective coping mechanisms, call your EAP at 266-6561.

### What does research tell us about stress?

If you keep triggering that response throughout the day, maybe several hundred times a day, you are going to get yourself into a pickle. Your body is going to become eroded by the toxicity of this response. This is when the body starts to break down. You get sick more often when your immune system is compromised by stress.



### I've read that it is not major catastrophes in our lives that erode us but the little stresses that wreak havoc on us. Is that true?

Sure, it's like going through bramble bushes. You walk and you cut yourself here and you cut yourself there and pretty soon you go to bed and you have all these little pains and aches all over you and you are saying, "What happened?" Your whole body is full of cuts from the brambles. I think that's what happens during the day, and it's like a domino effect.

### Do you recommend meditation for calming down?

Definitely. I tell people to spend 15 to 20 minutes a day just calming themselves, whether it is through meditation or even prayer. A lot of repetitive activities become meditative, like knitting or needlepoint.

And exercise is a wonderful way to reduce stress. If you get into a kickboxing class or an aerobics class, the repetition plus the activity stops the mind in its tracks. It is very hard to skip rope and make yourself crazy about the fax machine.

### What are some good resources for stress management?

Books by David Burns or Albert Ellis. Davis Burns' classic is *Feeling Good, the New Mood Therapy*. He's done wonders for depressed or anxious people. Counseling is also helpful. Go sit and talk to a party who is not involved in what you do. Because often what we do is we get people around us to validate our disturbing behavior. We say, "Don't you feel this way?" and they say, "Absolutely." And what we need is someone to say, "No, this is not how you are supposed to feel. This behavior is not serving you."

Source: LifeLines/2017



# An Introvert's Guide (For Extroverts, Too)

FEI Workforce Resilience and meQuilibrium

Do you feel drained after large office parties? Tend to think before you speak in meetings? Prefer deeper connections to water cooler chitchat? If so, there is a good chance that you are an introvert. And you're in good company: up to half of the population identifies as an introvert. So even if you aren't one, we can guarantee you know one.

Understanding your own personal strengths and tendencies lends itself to self-awareness, which allows us to build on those strengths while addressing our weaker spots. Introverts run a high risk of feeling overextended and stressed in our extroverted-focused world. That's why we've put together a guide to countering that stress and harnessing your introvert superpowers. We also included how extrovert friends, coworkers, and colleagues can help.

## Recognize what you need

*For introverts:* Susan Cain, author of the book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, and leader of the Quiet Revolution, suggests finding roles that fit your needs. Once you know what you need, you can create strategies to honor it, such as carving out quiet spaces within your office. Or do as LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner does, and make it a point to leave meeting-free slots open in your schedule everyday so you have time and space to reflect and think.

*For extroverts:* Once you know the conditions in which your introverted colleagues thrive, set them up for success by letting them take over written tasks, or allow them to respond to you by e-mail after they've had some time to think and re-group.

## Learn from the other half

*For introverts:* While there's value in taking measures to recharge, it's important to recognize when those strategies are serving you and when they're causing you to miss out on potential opportunities for growth. Take a cue from your extroverted counterparts and come up with a game plan to flex your social muscle. Use personalized coping strategies for dealing with social interactions, such as visiting the venue of a social event beforehand or setting incremental social goals for yourself at your own pace (like talking to one new person per day). Lifehack.org suggests listening to a funny podcast or watching a funny movie or TV show before entering a stressful social situation to lighten your mood. Whatever strategies you employ, realize that just like any skill, stretching your social boundaries takes practice, and is often uncomfortable.

*For extroverts:* Step out of your comfort zone by taking some lessons from your introverted colleagues. Take a full minute to think before you speak (or act) and thoughtfully weigh your options before making a decision. Sincerely make an effort to hear out everyone's opinion before drawing a conclusion.

## Let your strengths shine

*For introverts:* Trying to match or compete with the volume of extroverted expression is a waste of your uniquely introverted strengths. In fact, it is a misconception that you need to speak up to have an impactful presence. A recent study by the Harvard Business School found that introverts tend to make excellent team members and leaders, due to their shrewd ability to hear and synthesize the various points of views of others before voicing their own.

The key is learning to harness those tendencies as strengths. For example, if your natural tendency is to listen, use this to your advantage by honoring it in social situations—be an active listener and insightful question-asker, rather than forcing yourself to talk more.

*For extroverts:* Once you know the conditions in which your introverted colleagues thrive, set them up for success by letting them take over written tasks, or allow them to respond to you by e-mail after they've had some time to think and re-group.

## Develop a growth mindset

*For introverts:* It's psychologically proven that when you interpret difficult or uncomfortable situations as "challenges" and "adventures," you feel better-equipped to cope with stress and anxiety. It's important to be kind to yourself as you step beyond your comfort zone. Rather than comparing yourself to your extroverted counterparts, see them as useful tools in your growth process.

*For extroverts:* While there may be a ton you can learn from your introverted colleagues, there's also a ton they can learn from you! Don't feel that you have to compromise your strengths as you step aside to make room for them to shine. Instead, focus on sharpening those communication techniques and use those extroverted strengths of yours to bolster your colleagues so that everyone can reach their greatest potential.

# 10 Tips for Green Spring Cleaning

## FEI Workforce Resilience

It's that time of year again—time to get down and dirty with a thorough spring cleaning. Our homes have been shut up all winter and most are in need of some freshening. This year, give your house a green spring cleaning by avoiding dangerous chemicals and harsh cleaners. There are healthier ways to do it—for you and the environment.

Did you know that indoor air pollution in our homes can be as much as 100 times worse than outdoor air pollution? Most of that pollution comes from the evaporation of VOC's (volatile organic compounds) or the "offgas" from cleaning supplies, air fresheners, and home decorating items like paint, wallpaper, and carpeting. While we think we're cleaning and disinfecting our homes, we're really loading the air with toxic chemicals.

### 1. Open the windows.

The best way to get dirty air moving out and fresh air moving in is to open the doors and windows. Feel the breeze.

### 2. Skip the air fresheners.

Chemical fresheners can cause eye, skin, and respiratory irritation. Aerosol air fresheners are even worse — the tiny air-borne particles can damage nerves and lodge in your lungs. Buy fresh flowers in lieu of traditional air fresheners. An open box of baking soda, cedar blocks, and dried flowers also add natural fragrance to the room.

### 3. Use vegetable-based cleaning products instead of harsh chemical cleaners.

Vegetable-based cleaners, like those made with coconut oil, are becoming more popular every day. Even the makers of Clorox have a vegetable-based cleaning line on the market. Choose vegetable-based dishwashing detergent too. (Traditional dish detergent is made from petroleum. If every family replaced just one 28 oz. bottle of petroleum-based dish detergent with a vegetable-based product, we could save 82,000 barrels of oil.)

### 4. Vinegar, vinegar, and more vinegar.

Nature's cleaning miracle, vinegar can be used to clean just about anything. Use it straight to clean kitchen floors or wash windows, mix it with baking soda and essential oils to clean sinks, and even use it to remove stains in your carpet.

### 5. Get some baking soda too.

Multi-purpose baking soda can be used for everything from freshening the air, carpet, or furniture to scrubbing the toilet and tub.

### 6. Don't use bleach or any cleaners containing chlorine.

The problems with chlorine bleach are numerous—it can burn skin and eyes and prove fatal if swallowed. When it goes down the drain, it becomes toxic to the natural world too. An herbal-based sanitizer or one by Seventh Generation is a good alternative, as is just plain old hot water and soap. White vinegar also works wonders. (see 4.)

### 7. Skip the harsh chemical cleaners in the bathroom.

Make that porcelain sparkle with non-chlorine bleach cleaners or white vinegar and a baking soda-water paste. (See 5.)

### 8. Use natural fiber sponges and rags to do the cleaning.

Avoid using paper towels and other one-time use tools.

### 9. Skip the antibacterial soap.

It's just not necessary. The widespread use of antibacterial soap is also leading to antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria.

### 10. When you make the switch to natural cleaning products, be sure to safely dispose of any dangerous chemical products.

Don't pour them down the drain, into the ground, or into the trash. Read the labels or check with your waste management provider for options.

Source: LifeLines/2017





**Earlier this year,** the EAP Office asked for your recommendations for a book, article, or video that you found helpful or inspiring so that the information could be shared with other City employees. Here are the titles that come highly recommended by your co-workers.

Tresa from EAP recommends *The Resiliency Advantage* by Al Siebert, PhD. Dr. Siebert explains how and why some people are more resilient than others and how resiliency can be learned at any age. Dr. Siebert details a unique five-level program for becoming more resilient.

Mayor Soglin recommends *The Leaders Handbook* by Peter R. Scholtes. A guide to inspiring your people and managing the daily workflow, which is essential to serving City residents.

Coleen from Central Payroll recommends two books by Kerry Patterson:

- *Crucial Conversations*
- *Crucial Confrontations*

I really enjoyed reading *Crucial Conversations* and *Crucial Confrontations*. I feel that it helped me reduce my anxiety about having workplace conversations by providing tools to better prepare myself for those crucial interactions. I initially read the series as part of a supervisor development goal at my prior job but realized quickly that everyone could benefit from reading these both in their personal and professional lives.

Sherri from EAP likes *The Good Life Project* Podcast, hosted by Jonathan Fields. [www.goodlifeproject.com/radio](http://www.goodlifeproject.com/radio)

Inspirational, unfiltered conversations and stories about finding meaning, happiness, purpose, inspiration, creativity, motivation, spirituality, love, confidence and success in life. This podcast has been a great introduction to many inspiring individuals.

Hailey from EAP suggests *Upstream* by Mary Oliver.

I associate this collection of essays with resiliency, and I like that she promotes teaching the life lessons we learn through some sort of creative outlet, which for her is poetry and connecting to nature, where she makes more sense of the world. An excerpt: "In the beginning I was so young and such a stranger to myself I hardly existed. I had to go out into the world and see it and hear it and react to it, before I knew at all who I was, what I was, what I wanted to be."

Nichole from the Madison Public Library has these recommendations:

- *Making Work Work: The Positivity Solution For Any Work Environment* by Shola Richards  
The best resource I've found for reconciling the idealism of vulnerability with the reality of a challenging workplace has been this book.
- *The Episodic Career: How To Thrive At Work In The Age Of Disruption* by Farai Chideya  
I like this one because it helps the reader focus on her or his individual attributes, through self-reflection and stories. It also acknowledges, in a matter-of-fact way, some of the systemic factors like inequity that affect Americans' work lives and career paths. Very insightful!



Don from Parks - Olbrich Gardens suggests *Shadow Divers*, a true story about scuba divers discovering a WW2 destroyer sub off the East Coast.

Shannon from Housing has the following recommendations:

- *Healing Night* by Rubin Naiman was essential to me in understanding insomnia and how my lifestyle habits were contributing to sleep problems. By changing my nighttime routine and my wake-up routine, according to simple suggestions in this book, I was able to alleviate long term insomnia.
- *Radical Acceptance* by Tara Brach presented a new way to perceive oneself, and the meditations and visualizations were accessible and practical steps in developing self-compassion, which is vital in extending compassion to others.

## Tips for Green Cleaning

by Hailey Krueger

My natural cleaning cabinet includes vinegar, essential oils (lavender, peppermint, and tea tree), washing soda, borax, baking soda, castile soap, and a few bars of bath soap. Some brands of microfiber cloths are also really effective and clean with just water.

### Recipe for Dish Soap

- 2 1/2 cups boiling water
- 1 tablespoon Borax
- 1 tablespoon washing soda
- 2 tablespoons white distilled vinegar
- 1/2 cup liquid castile soap
- 10 drops essential oil (optional)

Combine the borax and washing soda in a mixing bowl along with the castile soap and vinegar. Boil the water and then slowly add the ingredients in your mixing bowl, using a whisk to gently incorporate. If desired, add 10 drops of essential oil. Let the mixture come to room temperature before using, it will thicken as it cools. This is a "low suds" product and does not leave streaks! (Popsugar.com)

### Recipe for Spider Repellent

A combination of dish soap and essential oils does a great job of repelling spiders and is perfectly safe around children and pets:

- 1 quart warm water
- 5-8 drops dish soap
- 5-8 drops essential oil (tea tree, lavender, peppermint and/or citrus—a combination works well)

Mix all ingredients together in a spray bottle and spray on the outside of window and door frames and any other places that insects might come into the house. Apply every 2-3 weeks. Really works!

### Recipe for Laundry Soap

- 1 bar bath soap or castile bar soap
- 1 cup washing soda
- 1 cup borax
- 10-20 drops essential oil

Grate 1 bar of soap on a box grater or in food processor. Combine with washing soda, borax and essential oil - mix well. Use 2-3 Tbsp per load.

*Thanks for reading,  
we hope you found the information useful!*

**You can reach any of us by calling the  
EAP Office at (608) 266-6561**

**External Available 24/7:  
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