



# CORPORATE HARMONY

An Enlightened Approach to Leadership and Organizational Development

Hello again from Corporate Harmony and welcome to the Module 2 Week 1 'Conversation Starter'!!

Modern life is full of hassles, deadlines, frustrations, and demands. For many people, stress is so commonplace that it has become a way of life. Stress isn't always bad. In small doses, it can help us perform under pressure and motivate us to do our best. But when we're constantly running in emergency mode, our mind and body pay the price.

Stress is a normal physical response to events that make us feel threatened or that upset our balance in some way. In fact, for many people, any amount of change at all can trigger stress, especially if it's perceived to be unwanted change. When we sense danger—whether it's real or imagined—our body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight-or-freeze” reaction, or the *'stress response.'*

The stress response is the body's way of protecting you. When working properly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life—giving you extra strength to defend yourself, for example, or spurring you to slam on the brakes to avoid an accident. The stress response also helps you rise to meet challenges. When you perceive a threat, your nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones rouse the body for emergency action. Your heart pounds faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and your senses become sharper. These physical changes increase your strength and stamina, speed your reaction time, and enhance your focus.

In today's fast paced and ever changing business climate, the most dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on us. We get used to it. It starts to feel familiar, even normal. We don't notice how much it's affecting us, even as it takes a heavy toll.

The signs and symptoms of stress overload can be almost anything. Stress affects the mind, body, and behavior in many ways, and everyone experiences stress differently. Not only can overwhelming stress lead to serious mental and physical health problems, it can also take a toll on our relationships at home and at work.

Because of the widespread damage stress can cause, it's important to know your own limit. But just how much stress is "too much" differs from person to person. We're all different. Some people are able to roll with the punches, while others seem to crumble in the face of far smaller obstacles or frustrations. Some people even seem to thrive on the excitement and challenge of a high-stress lifestyle.

Our ability to tolerate stress depends on many factors, including the quality of our relationships, our general outlook on life, our emotional intelligence, and genetics. Our stress tolerance level can be influenced by things such as how good our support network is, our sense of control, our general attitude and life-outlook, our awareness of and ability to deal with our emotions, our knowledge and preparation

when going into a stressful situation, and our knowledge base of the effects of stress on our mental, emotional, behavioral and social capacity, just to name a few.

The stress hormones, most notably adrenaline and cortisol, erode higher-brain networks, inhibiting us from succeeding fully at life. Chronic stress means the stress response system is turned on nearly full-time, releasing toxic hormones into our system, and shutting down the 'creative and executive' parts of our brain. Stress hormones, when continuously in our system can even shrink our higher brain networks responsible for creativity and decision-making. Stress hormones eventually expand the lower brain networks that switch the emotional set point to negative. They can impair the immune system, ruin the cardiovascular system, and damage chromosomes producing cancer cells and cause premature aging. Stress hormones, if allowed to run rampant and continuous, can even kill brain cells, and can eventually kill you, if you ignore the stress responsible for triggering the hormones.

At work, stress dampens performance, thwarts teamwork, leads people to make bad decisions, and accounts for nearly half of turnover. A few of the negative behavior patterns that are typical of stress impairment were listed last week.

In today's organizations, when a company hires an employee, they are essentially hiring that person's brain and hoping it's a smart brain that will grow even smarter with experience. But place that person in a high pressure work environment without the tools to transcend stress, and the likelihood is that he or she will lose brain capacity. In reality, stress can drain organizational brain power.

Brain scans from the Mayo Clinic show the impact of stress on brain function. One scan shows a brain beleaguered by stress. The other shows a brain functioning at optimum, lit up and pulsing with activity. The scan of optimal brain function looks like the massive network of lights you see when flying on a dark night over a metropolis like Toronto, while the stressed brain looks like the dim lights you see scattered here and there as you fly over north mid-west farmland. The difference between the two brain scans is a good representation of the brain power that is lost due to the continuous emotion of 'stress.'

The **HOMWORK** for Module 2 is very similar to what you have been doing for Module 1:

1. Listen to this audio of the weekly 'Conversation Starter' at least once more in the next 7 days, and download the written script of the weekly 'Conversation Starter'. You must use this written transcript at least 2 times in the next 7 days. Some suggestions might be for you to share it with a friend or colleague, add it as an agenda item to one of your meetings, or use it as the conversation starter when you gather with your group. In Week 2, you will use "Week 2 Conversation Starter". In Week 3, you will use "Week 3 Conversation Starter". And in Week 4, you will use "Week 4 Conversation Starter".
2. Set up an hourly reminder to yourself (either on your computer or your phone) for a 'personal check-in'. You will see we have added one more question to your personal check-in protocol. So, when the reminder goes off, ask yourself the following questions: "(1) What sort of feelings have I had since my last check-in?"; and "(2) What have my thought patterns been like since my last check-in?"; and finally, "(3) What have my behavior patterns been like since my last check-in?"
3. In your private 'Positive Presence Skill Building' page where you accessed 'Module 2' you will see a link for "Resources Page". Click on that link and look at the LIBRARY Section, then click on Corporate Harmony's "**BOOK STORE LIBRARY**".

- Browse through the Library and pick a book, any book. Then download it, buy it, find someone to borrow it from ... whatever ... and start reading. Read one quarter of the book each week so that it is finished at the end of week 4.
4. Again, in your private 'Positive Presence Skill Building' page where you accessed 'Module 2' you will see the link for "Resources Page". Click on that link and look at the LIBRARY Section, then click on Corporate Harmony's "**FAVORITES LIBRARY**". Then pick two new websites to visit.
- Before the end of this week, visit your first website and read everything there is to read on it.
  - In Week 2, visit your first website again and sign up for something free (you will have to give your email address, but when you are finished the 'freebie' just go into the next email they send you, go to the bottom of the email, and 'unsubscribe' and you will not be swamped by their continuous emails).
  - In Week 3, visit your second website and read everything there is to read on it.
  - In Week 4, visit your second website again and sign up for something free (you will have to give your email address, but when you are finished the 'freebie' just go into the next email they send you, go to the bottom of the email, and 'unsubscribe' and you will not be swamped by their continuous emails).
5. Refer again to Corporate Harmony's **Generic Behavior Questionnaire**.
- Select one more new question and read it, and then ask of yourself this question "How can I do this better?" Do this exercise of reading the same question and asking yourself daily for the remainder of this week.
  - In Week 2, select a different question and read it, and then ask yourself this question "How can I do this better?" Do this exercise of reading and asking yourself daily for the remainder of Week 2.
  - In Week 3, select a different question and do this exercise of reading and asking yourself daily for the remainder of Week 3 ... and so on for Week 4.

Acquiring the skill of Positive Presence is a slow and gentle process that begins with awareness ... but it's also a process that must be doused liberally with forgiveness -- especially self-forgiveness -- as well as a good solid pinch of humor. Remember, the more time we spend in the positive, the greater our capacity for achieving peak performance, for building and maintaining good relationships, and for experiencing good health...

So my friends, go to Week 5 in your Positive Presence Skill Building Journal, and until next time, let the skill of Positive Presence work for you.

*Catherine M.E. Osborne*

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<http://corporateharmony.ca>