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The Write Stuff

A quarterly compendium of writing tips and other useful information

COPING WITH **STRESS!**

By Jeff Rubin

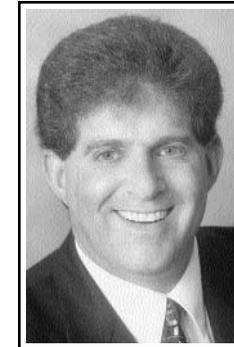
A few months ago my friend Craig Harrison, a professional speaker, gave a talk at a meeting of Forty Plus.

It's a nonprofit organization that facilitates and supports career transitions for business and professional people 40 and older who are executives, managers, and professionals.

These people are unemployed, either downsized out of their jobs or former owners of now-defunct businesses.

"I arrived early to get a feel for the group, before delivering a program on elevator speeches for job seekers called 'On the Rise With Your Elevator Speech,'" says Craig.

"Members introduced themselves with 30-second summaries of who they were, what they were looking for and what was happening in their lives. One woman shared how she had been a recent victim of identity theft. A few moments later another person said



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that he, too, had been victimized by identity theft.

When Craig began his program, he scrapped his prepared opening and addressed the topic that was on everyone's mind.

"What is this world coming to?" Craig asked, "when criminals are stealing the identities of the unemployed! And worse yet, you may already have a new job, but someone else is collecting your paycheck!"

Well, he got a big laugh, a bond was formed, and he had an attentive audience for the rest of his talk.

Whether you're unemployed, out of business, in business but struggling, or unhappy in your current job,

> **Inside**

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WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR DAY GETS AWAY

Just 15 minutes into your work day, your list of things to do today is dust.

A whole new set of problems has hijacked your attention. At day's end 'the list' floats to the surface again.

Though you've been taking care of business all day long, you've accomplished few, if any, of the tasks that seemed so important at the beginning of the day. You feel like a failure.

Can you relate? It's a tribute to the spirit of optimism that even though we have the same experience over and over again, we continue to believe that if we create a plan, the day will unfold exactly according to that plan. We need to think again. Days like that are rare.

If you find yourself frustrated by the daily shift in plans, take a look at what came up through the day, and the decisions you made about where to put your time and attention.

Were the unexpected tasks more important to your key results than the tasks you had planned to tackle? If so, shifting your attention was the right thing to do. Don't beat yourself up over sound decisions.

If the new tasks weren't that important and you let yourself be sidetracked, then, as Desi Arnaz said to Lucille Ball:

"Somebody got some 'splainin' to do!"

Test each new task that challenges your plan. Is it really important? If it's a surprise, it likely arrives with an



PAT KATZ

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air of urgency. But before you leap to the new challenge, pause to consider how spending time and energy on this new task will help you reach your key goals more effectively than what you had planned.

If you have trouble sorting out the relative importance and priority, it could be that your working goals are fuzzy or in conflict. Take time to clarify the big picture and rank conflicted goals and targets - determining what matters most. It could be time well spent.

After you've put out a fire, learn from the experience by asking these questions. How did this important but unexpected task come to be a surprise? Did we ignore an important issue for too long? Did we miss a cue that might have helped us anticipate this problem?

When your list of accomplishments at day's end doesn't equate with your list of intentions from day's start, you can still consider it a success if - you tackled the tasks that really mattered, made sound choices on the fly, and invested a few moments in learning from your experience of the day.

* * *
Patricia Katz owns Optimus Consulting. Visit her website at www.patkatz.com.

COPING WITH STRESS

> **From front page**
there's plenty of stress in our lives.

I was talking about this to my childhood friend Dan Steele, who lives in Maryland. He just found a management-level job after being unemployed for more than three years. So he knows about stress.

I asked him how he coped. He sent me the following message:

"As you know, the last few years have been kind of tough on me and prior to that I was under significant stress at my various management positions. Somehow, I survived this far and I have indicated below some of the "tools" that kept me sane."

MAINTAIN PROPER PERSPECTIVE

Most situations and problems are not as bad, or as important, as you may first feel. Putting things in their proper perspective is helpful.

Learn and use the serenity prayer: Accept what you cannot change and work to change what you can.

Ask yourself:
• What is the worst possible thing that can happen to you and how does this fit into the big scheme of life?

• How important is your problem to the more than 1.4 billion people in the People's Republic of China?

• How important will you think your problem will be one year from now, 10 years from now, etc.

TAKE TIME TO DO THINGS THAT YOU LIKE TO DO

Exercise regularly, keep a record of your workouts and, if possible, exercise with someone else. Set goals, track your progress and re-calibrate as required.

Do something that you always wanted to do. Start a new hobby, take dance lessons, learn how to speak a foreign language, build a barn.

Do a few projects that you can complete quickly and get satisfaction in knowing that you did something useful (paint the room, mow the lawn, fix the fence).

INCORPORATE TIMEOUTS INTO YOUR DAY

Take a walk at lunch or during the day to clear your mind.

Work on something else to let your mind relax a little (usually when you come back to the problem you either have some new insights and/or have thought of a potential solution subconsciously).

BALANCE YOUR ROUTINE

Try to have some things in your normal day that provide balance. Having a routine where you go into "automatic" can be very soothing if properly planned.

— Read the paper, a magazine or a book.

— Watch a favorite TV program.

— Have dinner with the family with the TV off and maybe the radio/CD on to some of your favorite music.

— Take a hot shower before going to sleep.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Plan on at least 6-8 hours of sleep per night. If you can't get enough during the week then make it up a little during the weekend, and/or take power naps when possible.

Avoid watching the news before going to bed.

LAUGH AND CRY

— Don't take yourself too seriously.

— Look for the humorous side of things.

— Occasionally watch a real tear jerker; it flushes out more than just your eyes.

"These are just a few of the tools that I used. It is also very important to 'share' with your family and friends.

"Knowing that you are not alone and that there are others that care about you is a major help.

"Getting a hug from the people you love has unbelievable healing power."

