

THINK OR SINK

By Gina Mollicone-Long ©2010

Stress is nonexistent. I know that sounds crazy. But it's true. Think about it – you can't put stress in a wheelbarrow. It's not an actual "thing." So, what is it? Stress is a *decision* to classify something as *stressful*. Stress is a reaction. In many cases, stress is an overreaction to the circumstances. But the reaction is not universal. Some people consider flying in an airplane to be one of the most stressful things they can experience, whereas others fall asleep as soon as the plane taxis onto the runway. Same experience; completely different reactions. The difference lies in the perspective.

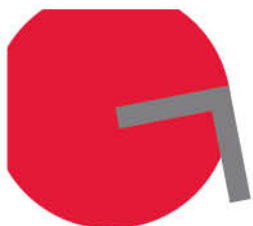
I'm not saying that the effects of stress aren't real. They are very real. In fact, stress can be attributed as the cause for most of the ailments we experience today. This is all the more reason for you to consider that you are actually in control of what you classify as stressful and what you do not. Doing this puts you back in control of experience. You are no longer at the mercy of external circumstances. You can always choose how you respond to a situation and therefore you can always be in control as to what you allow as stress in your life.

The instinctive response to any crisis or challenge is a predictable and hard-wired physiological reaction. It's called your fight-or-flight response. The problem isn't the response itself, the problem is that we tend to overuse this response in situations that don't really warrant it. In this fight-or-flight state you lose the ability to "see the big picture." If the stress remains long enough, your body produces cortisol in order to maintain the heightened stress response. Too much cortisol in the body has been shown to suppress immune function as well as interfere with memory function. This stress response is designed to attend to a real crisis. It was never intended to be used all the time because it places a burden on the body's ability to function at an optimal level.

You can triumph over your circumstances simply by making a choice to respond in a powerful and positive way. There are three ways that you can shift and alter your experience of your circumstances. It all comes down to who you choose to BE in any situation.

Your state of being is made up of a mental, emotional and physiological component at any given point in time. If you change one of these components, then you actually change the whole set.

The mental component of your response is sometimes called your focus. Your reticular activating system (RAS for short) is a part of your brain that brings relevant information to your attention. It filters what information enters your conscious awareness. Have you ever heard the term "what you focus on expands"? You are literally being bombarded with millions of bits of information every single second, but you can only really handle about 126 bits per second. That means that the majority of what is actually available for your attention gets filtered out by a process of deletion, distortion and generalization. You can literally create



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your reality by setting your focus on what you want to have in your life. If you focus on what's wrong, then you will always get more of what's wrong. In the end, your focus is a choice and your RAS will seek out what you are looking for. The key then is to always focus on what you want.

The second way to shift your experience is to choose powerful and positive emotions. The field of social neuroscience has found that an empathetic response gets blocked by a stress response. Research by the Institute of HeartMath shows us that when we experience emotions of compassion and empathy the levels of adrenaline and cortisol in our systems are greatly reduced. Furthermore, powerful biochemicals such as serotonin, dopamine and endorphins can be produced when we experience these positive emotions, leading to an overall increase in our well-being. We always have the choice to change our emotional response and it seems that choosing powerful positive emotions goes a long way to increasing our quality of life.

Finally, you can change your experience simply by changing your physiology (your body). Think of a time when you were feeling particularly tired or lazy. Now, imagine what would happen if you just jumped up off the couch and started cheering and clapping your hands. The whole situation would change wouldn't it and you would probably feel energized and alert? This is the power of shifting your body as it can lead you to a completely different experience.

In the end, it really all comes down to a choice. It comes down to your choice to choose your response to any situation. When you alter your response to any situation then you alter its effect on your life. Either you make the powerful choice for yourself or another choice gets made for you based on the input of the people and circumstances around you. We all wish we were better versions of ourselves.

Gina Mollicone-Long helps people get what they want. She is an international best-selling author, compelling speaker and peak performance specialist with a mission to reveal greatness in individuals, teams and organizations. She is the co-founder and CEO of The Greatness Group, a multi-national corporate team building and training company. Since 1998, she has trained, coached or spoken to tens of thousands of people globally. Her books, *Think or Sink* and *The Secret of Successful Failing* are widely read and enjoyed by people around the world. She can show you exactly how to get out of your own way.

