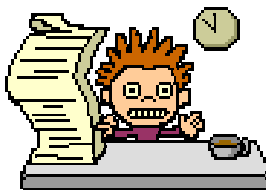


Faculty and Employee Assistance Program Newsletter

A Decision Making Approach to Managing Stress

Submitted by Rebecca Mason, RN, CNS, CEAP
UVA Faculty and Employee Assistance Program

Nancy and Donald Tubesing presented a model for dealing with stress in their book *Structured Exercises in Stress Management*, called the “AAABC’s of Stress Management”. This approach views stress management as a decision making process involving three basic ways to deal with stress:



- Alter it
- Avoid it
- Accept it by
- Building our resistance or
- Changing our perception

The AAABC method begins with simpler strategies and moves to more complex techniques. All of the approaches can be used effectively to cope with stress.

Altering means changing something about the source of stress. Problem solving, direct communication, organizing and time management are common techniques.

Avoiding refers to removing oneself from the stress or preventing the stress. Techniques involve walking away, saying “no”, setting boundaries, being assertive, or delegating.

Accepting means to equip oneself physically and mentally for stress by building resistance. We do this by caring for ourselves in four areas of our life: physical, mental, social and spiritual. *Physical* self care involves proper diet, adequate sleep, exercise, and learning and practicing relaxation techniques. *Mental resistance* is fostered through taking time for mental health, maintaining a positive attitude and being clear about our own goals, values and priorities. *Social resistance* increases when we communicate clearly, build and maintain support systems, and invest time and energy in relationships with friends and intimate partners. *Spiritual resistance* is strengthened through practices such as prayer and meditation, but also includes other activities that give life meaning.

There are some stressors however, that require more than the strategies above. This type of stressor is a reality that we have to learn to live with. It is not going to go away. The only thing we can change about this type of situation is how we are looking at it. This involves using a variety of cognitive techniques that help us change the way we perceive the stress. Changing irrational beliefs such as “I should succeed at everything I try” or “because he doesn’t like me I am a loser” can decrease our stress.

Reframing or redefining a situation is another option. The situation is happening anyway, so the best way to deal with the stress is to choose a positive way to look at it. To do this, ask yourself what other ways can I look at this situation? Try and come up with as

many other options as possible. It can help to ask yourself what is good about the situation. For example, if your coworker is out on medical leave and you are doing her work as well as your own, other perspectives might include having better job security, a chance to learn new skills or an opportunity to shine for your boss. You can also ask yourself what you might learn through dealing with the problem. Focus on what is controllable and on what exists, not on what doesn't exist. If you continue to focus on things you have no control over, or what you wish you had, stress just gets worse.



Many of us are stressed worrying over what might happen. David Posen, on his web site, calls this “long distance worrying”. Some people can't imagine not worrying because the only other option seems to be to deny the problem and be complacent until blindsided. Posen advocates choosing a middle ground between worry and complacency, that of concern. While worry involves emotions and is problem oriented, concern is solution oriented, and helpful instead of stressful.

Posen's term is “creative worrying” and he recommends facing the issue directly by asking four questions: What is the worst that can happen? Is it likely to happen? If it does happen, how will I handle it? What can I do to prevent or prepare for it? Once these questions are answered, you have done all you can do, and you have a plan-- then the problem is easier to let go.

Finally, consider talking to someone else about the problem. Sometimes another person can add a perspective that you had not considered.

<http://www.davidposen.com/>



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