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CORPORATE CLINIC: STRESSBUSTERS I

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Stressbusters is the name we have selected to identify the main theme of the next four *Corporate Clinic* sections. They will include:

October '89 STRESSBUSTERS I: *Understanding Stress*

Nov-Dec '89, STRESSBUSTERS II: *Holiday Stressbusters*

January '90, STRESSBUSTERS III: *Relaxation Techniques (part I)*

February '90, STRESSBUSTERS IV: *Relaxation Techniques (part II)*

UNDERSTANDING STRESS

Stress, in the simplest terms, is your physical and emotional reaction to change. It sounds almost too simple, but that's what stress is: your body's reaction to change. If you perceive the change to be threatening or if you don't understand it, it can cause physical effects on your body.

Let's say, for instance, you have a deadline to meet on the task you are performing. You say to yourself, "I have to get this done by four o'clock." Your body tenses. You know you must meet the deadline, and you focus your attention and concentrate on the task at hand, and you finish the task by four o'clock.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS TO STRESS

During the above mentioned stress cycle, certain things probably happened in your body of which you may or may not have been consciously aware. Your body geared up to accommodate the stress of the job at hand. Your muscles tensed, your jaw clenched, your pulse rate increased, and your blood pressure went up. These are the physical reactions to stress.

Perhaps you don't perceive the task as a challenge. Instead, you fear your ability to meet the deadline—or to perform the task at all. The same physical reactions would still occur, but instead of using the energy created within your body by the assignment (stressor) to focus your attention and concentrate on the task at hand, you were preoccupied with thoughts of your inability to perform the task properly or how hard the task is, to justify the possibility of not finishing the task properly or on time. With this attitude, you will probably still be tense or "stressed" even if you do meet the deadline.

This drains your positive attitude and self-confidence, and robs you of the enjoyment and satisfaction you should receive from performing your job well.

On the other hand, if you see the tasks before you as a challenge to be conquered, and you decide to take on the challenge and perform your tasks with your unique abilities, you will not only focus your attention, concentrate, and thus do better work, but you will also feel better about yourself and experience a sense of accomplishment from having successfully performed your duties.

HEALTHY REACTIONS TO STRESS

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Job stress creates an energy within your body that is vented, not only in physical responses, but also in your concentration on performing tasks. You need to know how to release or let go of this stress to enable you and your body to recuperate and rejuvenate so you can meet the next day's stresses and challenges with zest and vigor. Inability to vent the energy derived from meeting stress will make the physical effects of stress accumulate within your body and mind and can cause or contribute to health disorders such as emotional conditions, digestive troubles, high blood pressure, as well as causing or magnifying headaches, neck pain, or back pain.

Some say life is not a bed of roses, but I disagree. Life can be like a bed of roses! You can experience the beauty of the rose buds and flowers, as well as the rich green leaves surrounding the bloom, but every stem grows with sharp thorns. The beauty of the rose can overpower the pain of the thorn, or the thorn can keep you from plucking the rose. Nobody floats through life without experiencing raw deals, misfortune, and sorrow, but if you focus on these thorns, you will never see the beauty of the rose. It's your choice.

Healthy reaction to stress not only involves the way you perceive stress, but also the way you reverse or counteract its physical effects. The stress reaction gears you up inside, and in order to prevent this pent up energy from accumulating in your body, you have to shift gears. This means slowing down and using relaxation or special breathing techniques, as well as engaging in some form of enjoyable physical exertion to use up or vent the inner energy built up during periods of stress. This shifting of gears, both higher through enjoyable exercise, and lower through relaxation techniques, will help keep stress from accumulating and getting you down.