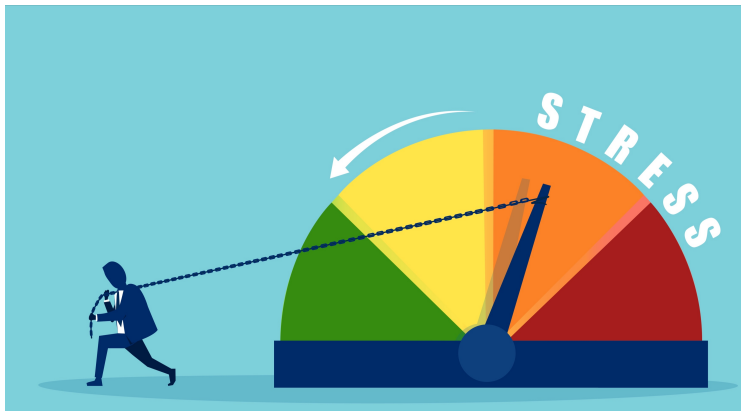


Stress-proof leadership

Being a leader has a distinct array of stress-inducing challenges and responsibilities. These include high expectations from their teams, stakeholders, and themselves. They are tasked with making crucial decisions, resolving conflicts, and delivering results. The relentless pressure to perform and achieve outcomes can be daunting.

Reasons why leaders succumb to stress

- ✓ The weight of responsibility and accountability for the outcomes of their decisions have far-reaching impacts on the organisation and people.
- ✓ Balancing multiple tasks and priorities across a spectrum of timelines, from strategy, people and team management to day-to-day operations.
- ✓ Pressure to meet targets and deadlines and to drive change while being mindful of remaining empathic and compassionate.
- ✓ Coping with personal challenges, such as family and work-life balance, exacerbates stress.



Impact of stress

The effects of stress on leaders can be profound, leading to burnout, anxiety, and health problems. It affects mental and physical well-being and decreases productivity and effectiveness. Further decision-making is impaired, and the capacity to inspire and motivate others diminishes overall performance. Under pressure, leaders struggle to manage emotions, communicate, and build relationships.

However, not all leaders experience high levels of stress. Some have developed strategies to manage and mitigate stress effectively.

Thriving under pressure

Here is how they do it.

1. **Self-care:** Prioritising physical health through regular exercise, a balanced diet and adequate sleep is fundamental. Physical well-being directly impacts mental resilience.
2. **Mindfulness and relaxation techniques:** Meditation, yoga and deep-breathing exercises can help leaders stay calm and focused. These techniques reduce stress and improve emotional regulation.
3. **Time management:** Effective time management helps leaders prioritise tasks and avoid feeling overwhelmed. Tools like calendars, to-do lists and time-blocking can enhance productivity and reduce stress.
4. **Delegation:** Leaders should delegate tasks to their team members. This reduces their workload, empowers their team and fosters a collaborative environment.
5. **Support networks:** Building strong professional and personal support networks provides leaders with a sounding board for ideas and emotional support during challenging times.
6. **Continuous learning:** Continuous learning and professional development help leaders stay adaptable and confident in their abilities. This can include attending workshops, reading or seeking mentorship.

7. **Positive mindset:** Maintaining an optimistic outlook and focusing on solutions rather than problems can help leaders navigate stressful situations more effectively. Practising gratitude and celebrating small wins can also boost morale.
8. **Setting boundaries:** It is essential to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life. Leaders should also ensure they take time off to recharge and avoid burnout.
9. **Seeking professional help:** If stress becomes overwhelming, leaders should not hesitate to seek professional help from a coach, therapist, or counsellor. Professional guidance can provide valuable coping strategies and support.

By incorporating these strategies, leaders can build resilience to stress, enhancing their ability to lead effectively and maintain their well-being. Nothing above is new. Knowing is only the first step. Doing is what counts.

“You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”
– *Martin Luther King*

References

- ✓ Ruderman, Centre for Creative Leadership, August 8, 2024.
- ✓ From work-life balance to work-life integration by Colleen Frankwitz, Korn Ferry, 2022.