

**Stress Relief Strategies  
When You Have**

**10 MINUTES  
OR LESS**



**STRONG**

**S**Tress | **R**esilience | **O**N | the **G**o

**PAULA DAVIS-LAACK, JD, MAPP**



# STRESS RELIEF STRATEGIES WHEN YOU HAVE 10 MINUTES OR LESS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

About This E-Book ..... 3  
Paula’s Burnout Story & the 3 Big Dimensions of Burnout..... 4  
The Upside of Stress ..... 5  
Resilience and Everyday Stress ..... 7

## **STRONG STRATEGIES**

Develop CORE Thinking..... 10  
7 Questions to Help You Reframe Stress ..... 11  
Develop a “Stress Helps” Mindset ..... 13  
Avoid the What-The-Hell Effect ..... 14  
Resilience Requires Recharging ..... 16  
\* SKILL #1: Recovery at Work ..... 17  
\* SKILL #2: The Burnout Curve – Where Are You At?..... 18  
\* SKILL #3: Prevent Generosity Burnout..... 19  
Create a Bigger-Than-Self Goal..... 20  
Change Your Passwords..... 21  
Build More High-Quality Relationships ..... 22  
Strategies to Bust the 6 Most Common Stressors ..... 23

About Paula ..... 26  
Endnotes ..... 27



# ABOUT THIS E-BOOK

The last thing I want to do is give you a book about quick stress relief strategies that takes you hours to read! This e-book includes some general information about the evolution of the science of stress, with the latest findings emphasizing (1) the upside of stress; and (2) how stress has been found to impact you at the cellular level, which means that that how you deal with stress can accelerate or decelerate the aging process.

These skills are quick...Many of the tools I've included are STRONG strategies. STRONG is my acronym for **ST**ress **R**esilience **ON** the **G**o, and these are skills that you can incorporate into your everyday life quickly. I did this because the more I teach busy professionals about stress resilience, the more I hear that you want quick strategies. Though some of the STRONG strategies are worksheet-based, many include simple coaching questions meant to help you develop self-awareness and crystalize your thinking. You don't have to use these skills in any particular order – simply start applying the ones that resonate with you.

These skills are research-based...The heart of my work involves translating research into skills for you to use and incorporate into your life. I don't want to give you some flimsy skill that isn't supported by science or is just the latest fad. My goal is to give you tools with a solid research efficacy so that you know you're using something supported by science. As always, though, research only goes so far. I always encourage you to "try it out." What works for you might not resonate for others.

Pay it forward...most of these skills are so simple to use that they can be easily taught to kids, significant others, colleagues and team members. Creating a culture of stress resilience starts when you pass these skills along to others.

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The logo for STRONG, with the word "STRONG" in a bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: S (orange), T (green), R (blue), O (red), N (purple), G (yellow).

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# MY BURNOUT STORY

I have a love-hate relationship with stress. Stress has helped me accomplish a great deal personally and professionally, but it's also gotten in my way and has undercut my resilience at times. Never was this more true than when I burned out at the end of my law practice. As it turns out, there were three big warning signs that I missed, which are actually the three big dimensions of burnout:

**EXHAUSTION:** I was chronically physically and emotionally exhausted. We all have tired days, weeks, and even months or longer, but this was different. I remember walking my golden retriever, Sadie, one sunny afternoon. She pulled over onto some grass to sniff around, and I almost fell asleep standing next to the curb, holding onto her leash. I joke that my pop out of bed on Monday mornings, jazzed and ready to start the day, turned into a slow drop and thud over time. I vividly remember staying up late on Sunday nights, watching bad infomercials with the hope that I could freeze time so Monday morning wouldn't come. That didn't work, of course, and actually made things worse because I went into work both disengaged and sleep deprived.

**CYNICISM:** Over time, everyone and everything started rubbing me the wrong way. Even clients who I loved started to bug me. Outwardly I was always very professional and helpful, but inwardly I would wonder to myself why they really needed my help. That is not a good way to think when your job is to help people deal with difficult legal matters. My cynicism and exhaustion fed off of each other – it's hard to be full of energy when you're cynical. I knew there was a problem when other lawyers (not exactly known for their optimism) noticed I was being too cynical!

**INEFFICACY:** Finally, I started to lose confidence and feel ineffective. I still felt confident in my ability to be a good lawyer, but I was losing confidence over where I fit into the legal profession at large. I had worked for a few years in a large law firm, then another few years in-house at a large company, and in my mind, that didn't leave a lot of options.

Underlying this entire process was an undercurrent of stress. All of the other attorneys in my office seemed to be able to manage their stress appropriately, or so I told myself. Why couldn't I? What was it about chronic stress in particular that was becoming so toxic to me, both physically and mentally? How could I get it to stop? These questions drove me to the University of Pennsylvania to study positive psychology, and in particular, resilience – the skill set to help you grow your capacity for stress-related growth.

Since then, I've used the tools I was taught, along with others I developed, to help thousands of busy professionals across a variety of professions build their resilience to stress. I want to continue to pass them along to all of you!

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# THE UPSIDE OF STRESS

Did you drive to the office this morning wondering whether your work stress could kill you? Me neither, but I recently spent time talking to different radio outlets around the country about stress. The focus of my interviews was an article called, “How Work Stress Can Kill You, Literally.”<sup>1</sup> Not exactly a light topic for the morning drive, yet I’m guessing that many of you experience some level of stress from your job.

Most of the headlines these days about stress tend to focus on the negative impact stress can have in your lives, and it’s true – too much stress can be harmful to your health. A study<sup>2</sup> from Harvard and Stanford researchers quantifies the cost of stress in the workplace, both in terms of mortality and associated healthcare costs. What they found is that ten different workplace stressors (such as, low job control, high job demand, unemployment, and lack of high-quality work relationships) contribute to more than 120,000 deaths each year and \$190 billion in healthcare costs.

While studies and articles like this abound, they don’t tell the entire stress story. A 2012 study surveyed almost 29,000 adults and asked them two questions:<sup>3</sup>

1. How much stress did you experience in the last year?
2. Do you believe that stress is harmful to your health?

Eight years later, the researchers checked to see whether stress impacted rates of mortality for these participants. What they found was that the participants with high levels of stress were more likely to die, BUT only if they also believed that stress was harmful to their health. The people with high levels of reported stress who did not believe that stress was harmful actually had the lowest risk of death of any group in the study.

## ***The New Science of Stress – Mindset Matters***

As it turns out, the way you think about stress might be your best weapon in managing it. The mindsets you adopt can have a powerful influence over your judgment, health, and behavior. Hotel room attendants who adopted the mindset that their work was exercise showed significant reduction in blood pressure, weight,

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BMI and hip to waist ratio;<sup>4</sup> people who had a negative mindset about aging were less likely to adopt helpful behaviors such as exercising and eating well;<sup>5</sup> and individuals who believed they were drinking a yummy, high-calorie milkshake felt more full (as shown by a steeper drop in the hunger-inducing hormone ghrelin) compared to the group who thought the shake was a healthy, low-calorie drink.<sup>6</sup>

Crum and her colleagues found that people who endorse a “stress helps” mindset report less depression and anxiety, higher levels of energy, work performance, and life satisfaction.<sup>7</sup>

## ***Beyond Fight or Flight***

The popular view of stress is that it elicits a fight or flight response. When you experience stress, your body gears up to either fight it or run from it. In reality, there are several different types of stress responses. In addition to fight or flight, you may experience a challenge response to stress. A stressor may motivate you to rise to the occasion, increase your confidence, and help you learn from mistakes. Stress can also cause you to seek out other people – something called the “tend and befriend” response to stress.<sup>8</sup> The tend and befriend response activates three different systems of your brain:<sup>9</sup>

- The Social Caregiving System: When activated, you feel more empathy, connection and trust;
- The Reward System: This system increases motivation and lessens fear; and
- The Attunement System: This system enhances your perception, intuition and self-control.

These systems make you social, brave and smart.

Last year before one of my speaking engagements, the speaker before me leaned over and said, “I always get so nervous before I speak.” That prompted us to have an interesting conversation about the different strategies we use to calm our nerves, and we both left the conversation feeling less stressed.

It’s time to start having a more balanced conversation about stress. While chronic stress exists and isn’t good for our mental or physical health, there is so much more to the stress story than all “stress is bad.”

*\*\* See page 13 for a STRONG strategy to help you develop more of a “stress helps” mindset.*

# RESILIENCE & EVERYDAY STRESS

Resilience is defined as your capacity for stress-related growth and it has two parts:

- How you bounce back and grow from big work or life adversities and traumas; and
- How you bounce back and grow as you deal with everyday stress and hassles.

The vast majority of written materials about resilience focus on the first aspect of resilience – what to do when you're faced with a big life trauma;<sup>10</sup> however, it's just as critical to develop resilience for life's everyday hassles. After all, it's not every day that you experience death, divorce or other traumatic events, but you do have to deal with work stress, the stress of raising a family, traffic, family conflict, and more much more regularly.

One study investigated whether levels of negative emotion people experience along with how they respond to everyday hassles had long-term health implications. Researchers asked participants to assess whether any of the following types of stressors had occurred in the past 24 hours: an argument, a situation where the participant could have argued but decided to let the issue pass, a problem at work, a problem at home, a problem in the participant's social network, or any other experience that occurred that most people would consider stressful but which wasn't one of the other five categories. Ten years later, the participants completed an interview. What they discovered is that the way these participants reacted to everyday stressors and hassles predicted changes in mental health outcomes across the 10-year span. The chronicity of frequent negative emotion and the inability to process everyday stress takes a toll on your mental health.<sup>11</sup>

In another study, researchers found that both the frequency and perceived intensity of daily hassles showed a significant relationship with overall health, a relationship that was stronger than the relationship provided by major life events. Both the frequency and intensity of day-to-day hassles were associated with illness.<sup>12</sup>

## ***The Telomere Effect*** <sup>13</sup>

New research in the area of chronic stress reveals that it actually ages us down to the cellular level. Telomeres (tee-lo-meres) are repeating segments of noncoding DNA that are housed at the ends of your chromosomes. If you want a good visual, telomeres look like the plastic tips on the ends of your shoelaces,

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and their function is to keep your DNA safe. Telomeres shorten each time your cells divide and they help determine how fast your cells age. The latest research in this area shows that your telomeres can be lengthened or shortened, making aging a more dynamic process than previously thought – a process that can be accelerated or slowed. While we will all get older, how we age is very much connected to our cellular health. If you're interested in how this process works, your goal should be to have more days of cell renewal than wear and tear.

Here are six known telomere lengthening activities:

- Exercise (this is critical)
- Take a three-minute breathing break
- Re-think your stress response (see the importance of creating a “stress helps” mindset above)
- Get enough sleep
- Take a self-compassion break
- Eat healthfully, but be careful about dieting. One study found that people who restricted their calories actually raised their cortisol levels. Elevated levels of cortisol in the body are a negative by-product of chronic stress and also contribute to the collection of belly fat.<sup>14</sup> In another study, researchers examined the dieting attempts of a group of pre- and post-menopausal women and found that for women in both groups, the more strict the dieting attempts, the shorter the telomere length (this was regardless of age, smoking and body mass index).<sup>15</sup>

# STRONG STRATEGIES

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# DEVELOP “CORE” THINKING

Building confidence requires getting outside of your comfort zone and experiencing failure and setbacks. When an adversity happens, how do you explain its cause? Based on the work of Dr. Martin Seligman, pessimistic thinkers often get stuck explaining failure in a personal way (“I’m all to blame”), a pervasive way (“this thing is going to impact lots of areas of my life”), and a permanent way (“this adversity is going to be around a long time – I can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel”).<sup>16</sup> To flip that, practice CORE thinking:

**C (CONTROL):** Ask yourself where you have a measure of control, influence or leverage in the situation.

**O (OTHERS):** What resources do you have that you can draw on – what people can help?

**R (REACH):** How can I limit the impact of this adversity so that it doesn’t influence other areas of my life?

**E (EVALUATE & EMBRACE):** First evaluate the root causes of the challenge that’s impacting you, then “embrace the suck.” An adversity is there to teach you something, and it will end at some point. Figure out what this challenge is here to teach you.

## **\*\* THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION TO ASK:**

“Where do I have a measure of control, influence or leverage in this situation?”

More than 50 years of psychological research has demonstrated that perceived control (often referred to as self-efficacy) is a big predictor of psychological health and general well-being and is a main ingredient of resilience. When people feel a sense of being in control, they show greater optimism, sustained attention, better problem solving, and higher levels of resilience. They are also more productive at work, especially during times of threat and uncertainty.<sup>17</sup>

# 7 QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU REFRAME STRESS

In order to develop resilience, you have to understand how you think about adversity, stress, and challenging situations. Your “inner critic” drives a number of counterproductive thinking styles like catastrophizing (the downward spiral style of thinking you may experience during a stressful event), having a fixed mindset (having the belief that your talents and abilities are fixed and aren’t able to be grown in any way),<sup>18</sup> and other thinking traps (jumping to conclusions, mind reading, consistently blaming yourself with things go wrong or consistently blaming other people or circumstances when things go wrong). The good news is that you can learn how to identify and correct these counterproductive thinking styles and convert your “inner critic” into your “inner coach” to develop a more flexible, accurate and thorough thinking style under stress.

When you are stuck thinking in a counterproductive way, ask yourself one of these questions to help you reframe your thinking and give you some much needed perspective:<sup>19</sup>

**1. What would I tell my friend/partner/child if he or she was in the same situation?** We beat ourselves up mentally big time. If you fail at something, is your internal dialogue something like this: “Man, you’re such an idiot! I can’t believe you did such a dumb thing!” Would you say those same things to a friend or partner or a child if they failed? Likely not, particularly if you want to preserve those relationships. The best thing you can do is quickly activate self-compassion.

**2. Have I experienced anything like this before? If yes, how did I deal with it?** Researchers followed more than 2,000 people for three years in order to examine how life adversity impacted their mental health and well-being. Their findings suggest that those participants who experienced some prior lifetime adversity (classified as two to six prior adverse life events) were least impacted by recent adverse events. In addition, people with a history of some life adversity reported better mental health and well-being than *both* people with a high history of adversity and people with no history of adversity.<sup>20</sup> Moderate levels of prior adversity teach you how to create effective coping skills, help you connect to social support networks, create a sense of mastery, and build your self-efficacy (the belief that you can produce results in your life).

**3. Is this event going to change my life in such a way that a “new normal” will emerge?** Depending on the severity of the challenge, you may have to face the reality that your life will have a “new normal.” A friend of mine was recently forced to close her business, and the financial impact meant that she had to sell her house. She’s adjusting to living in an apartment for the first time in decades.

**4. Is it possible that this event might change my life for the better or open new doors for me?** Posttraumatic growth is the positive personal changes that result from an individual’s struggle to deal with traumatic life events. According to psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, people tend to report growth in five specific areas in the aftermath of traumatic events: having a renewed appreciation for life; recognizing new paths for your life; enhanced personal strength; improved relationships; and spiritual growth.

**5. Will I still be dealing with this problem a year from now?** Resilient people both “embrace the suck” and have a realistic way of thinking about how much time a stress producing event will last. When faced with adversity, it’s tempting to assume that the challenge will be around forever, because that’s what it seems like in the moment. Asking this question will help you evaluate root causes and give you some perspective.

**6. Do I know anyone who has been through this who can help?** As I mentioned above, activating the “tend and befriend” response to stress has lots of benefits when it comes to appropriately managing your stress. In addition, having high-quality connections with other people is a cornerstone of resilience. My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer several years ago, and she relied on friends who had been through cancer too. If you can identify someone who has “been there done that,” it can be a source of comfort and confidence.

**7. What positive emotions can I leverage?** It might seem silly to think about positive emotions during an adversity, but positive emotions directly build your resilience. In addition to building resilience, positive emotions enhance decision- making, increase your creativity, and undo the negative physiological impact of negative emotions – important qualities to help you manage stressful situations.<sup>21</sup>

Legendary singer Lena Horne once said, “It’s not the load that breaks you down. It’s the way you carry it.” Stress and adversity are a part of work and life, but being able to reframe a stress producing event to allow for some perspective and flexibility will help you build your stress resilience.

# DEVELOP A “STRESS HELPS” MINDSET

While stress has benefits, you may be one of the many millions of people who really do think that stress is harmful. If that’s the case, how do you start to develop more of a “stress helps” mindset? Use the ARM technique developed by psychologist and researcher Alia Crum:<sup>22</sup>

**STEP 1.** Think of a recent, stressful event in your life. Describe it factually (who, what, where, when).

**STEP 2. A:** (Acknowledge stress when you experience it.) How did the stress impact you physically and psychologically? Where did you feel the stress physically?

**STEP 3. R:** (Recognize that stress is a response to something you care about.) What was the positive motivation or meaning behind the stress response?

**STEP 4. M:** (Make use of the energy stress gives you). How can you better use the surge of emotions, adrenaline or energy that stress gives you?

# AVOID THE “WHAT-THE-HELL” EFFECT

Several weeks ago I had the urge to bake. It’s one of my favorite hobbies, and I was trying to pass the time on a cold, dreary Saturday afternoon. As I combed through my recipes, I found an old gem – chocolate peanut butter bars – that I hadn’t baked in a number of years. As the warm bars cooled, I snuck a corner just to taste. After all, as the baker of said bars, I couldn’t serve them to others without first making sure they were delicious. The soft, warm peanut butter crust melted in my mouth, along with the gooey chocolate peanut butter topping. As I cleaned up, I cut another piece. Then another. By the next morning, my husband and I had polished off the entire pan.

Welcome to one of the biggest threats to your willpower – the “what-the-hell effect.”<sup>23</sup> The what-the-hell effect describes the cycle you feel when you indulge, regret what you’ve done, and then go back for more. Your brain rationalizes your behavior by saying, “You already blew your goal of only having two cookies... what the hell, you might as well eat the entire bag/box/pan.” The phrase was first coined by dieting researchers, but the what-the-hell effect can apply to any setback or willpower challenge.

According to Dr. Kelly McGonigal, who writes about this effect in her book *The Willpower Instinct*, “giving in makes you feel bad about yourself, which motivates you to do something to feel better. And what’s the cheapest, fastest strategy for feeling better? Often the very thing you feel bad about...It’s not the first giving-in that guarantees the bigger relapse. It’s the feelings of shame, guilt, loss of control and loss of hope that follow the first relapse.”

So how do you break the what-the-hell cycle and regain a measure of control over your goals? The most important thing you can do is to recognize how you respond when you realize that you’ve let yourself down. Do you automatically shift into self-criticism and beat yourself up over losing control? Most people do, which only fuels the feelings of guilt and shame. The trick is to shift into a mindset of self-compassion instead.

In one study, researchers asked a group of women to eat a doughnut within four minutes, then drink a glass of water so they would feel full. After eating the doughnut, some of the women received a message of self-compassion encouraging them to not be so hard on themselves for indulging. The other group of women did not receive this message. In the second part of the study, the women were then presented with bowls of candy and were invited to eat as little or as much of the candy as they wanted to. The women who received

the self-forgiveness message ate only 28 grams of candy compared to the 70 grams of candy consumed by the group that didn't get the message. That's a big difference! As it turned out, self-forgiveness didn't give these women a license to eat more; rather, it turned off the pipeline of guilt and prevented them from overeating during the candy challenge.<sup>24</sup>

According to Dr. McGonigal, when you experience a setback, harness these perspectives to avoid the downward spiral of shame, regret and loss of power:

### **THREE-STEP PROCESS:**

1. When you've failed, take a moment to describe the emotions you're feeling. Do you feel self-critical, and if so, what do you say to yourself? Slowing down to check in with yourself about this perspective helps you to understand what you're feeling before you rush to escape.
2. Normalize the setback. I'm not the only person who has polished off half a pan of dessert, and it probably won't be the last time.
3. What would you say to a friend who experienced the same setback? We beat ourselves up tremendously when we fail, but would you be just as harsh if your friend approached you with the same setback?

Whether your goals involve eating better, quitting smoking, reducing the amount of wine you drink each night, or writing your first novel, minimizing the what-the-hell effect will help you slow the downward spiral of shame and guilt and activate more of a self-compassionate, can-control mindset.



# RESILIENCE REQUIRES RECHARGING – 3 SKILLS TO HELP

It's difficult working in and managing a high intensity workplace. The expectation that you will be available around the clock has never been stronger as companies do whatever they can to retain clients. Busy professionals get to the office early, stay late, work weekends, are routinely contacted by both managers and clients to fulfill last minute requests (whether reasonable or not), and remain tied to their email 24/7.

Meet the Ideal Worker – the creation of our modern day workplace whereby people are expected to be totally dedicated to their jobs and always on call. In order to be an Ideal Worker, “people must choose, again and again, to prioritize their jobs ahead of other parts of their lives: their role as parents (actual or anticipated), their personal needs, and even their health.” This standard is becoming more and more untenable for workers generally, but for women in particular. According to Joan Williams, Director of The Center for WorkLife Law, the Ideal Worker is a big reason why some educated mothers opt out of the workplace, more so in the United States than in any other industrialized country. Within 15 years after graduating, close to 30% of women with MBA's who had become mothers were out of the workforce, along with 25% of lawyers, 25% of those with master's degrees and 15% of those with Ph.D.'s.

The Ideal Worker culture is burning people out at faster rates and zapping them of the precious energy and engagement they need to sustain their careers over the long haul. The Gallup organization surveyed more than 10,000 people to determine whether they were “fully charged” – getting regular doses of meaning, interactions, and energy at work. When asked to reflect about their day yesterday, only 11 percent of their sample reported having a great deal of energy.<sup>25</sup> In addition our collective lack of recovery is costing companies more than \$60 billion a year.<sup>26</sup>

Daily recovery from work is crucial in order to maintain high levels of well-being, performance and resilience. Recovery from work is defined as the process by which a person's functioning returns to pre-stressor levels and work-related strain is reduced.<sup>27</sup> It's not enough to go home and take a break. Optimal recovery is a combination of both internal recovery – the short breaks you take while you're at work and external recovery – how you spend your time after work, on the weekends, and on vacation.<sup>28</sup>

**Three skills to help you recharge are on the next pages. They are:**

1. Recovery at Work
2. The Burnout Curve – Where Are You At?
3. Prevent Generosity Burnout

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# SKILL: RECOVERY AT WORK

What types of breaks do you take at work each day? Most people laugh when I ask that question because so many of us are in the habit of plowing through our days without a break. This is unsustainable as consistent lack of recovery is a known factor in the burnout equation.

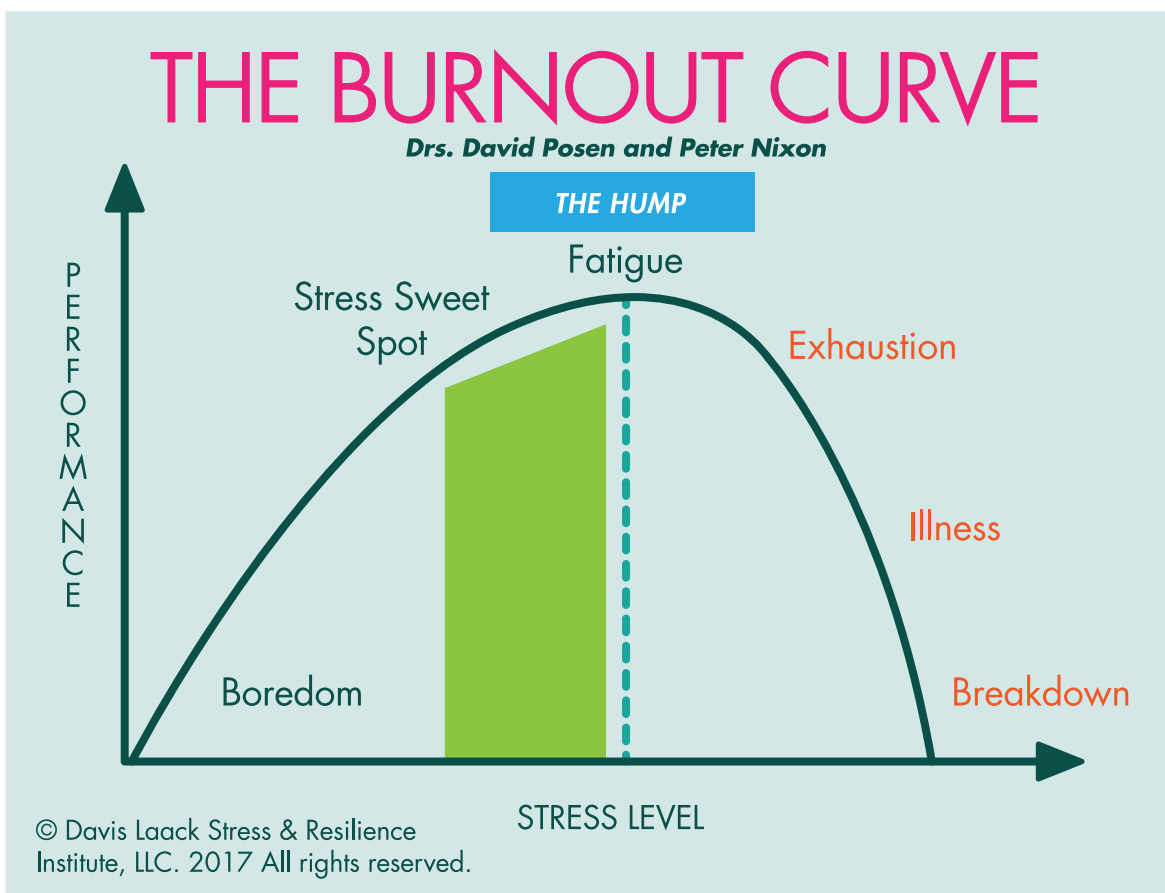
Recovery strategies at work shouldn't take a long time, after all this e-book is about strategies you can do when you're short on time. While you can certainly go for a quick walk or grab a cup of coffee, newer research shows that the activities listed in the chart below offer more "bang for your buck" in terms of getting some energy back at work.<sup>29</sup>

You don't have to do all of these. Pick one or two strategies and do them regularly.

STRATEGY	GOAL
1. Learn something new	
2. Focus on what gives you joy	
3. Set a new goal	
4. Do something that makes a colleague happy	
5. Make time to show gratitude to someone you work with	
6. Seek feedback	
7. Reflect on how you make a difference at work	
8. Reflect on the meaning of your work	
9. _____	

# SKILL: THE BURNOUT CURVE – WHERE ARE YOU AT?

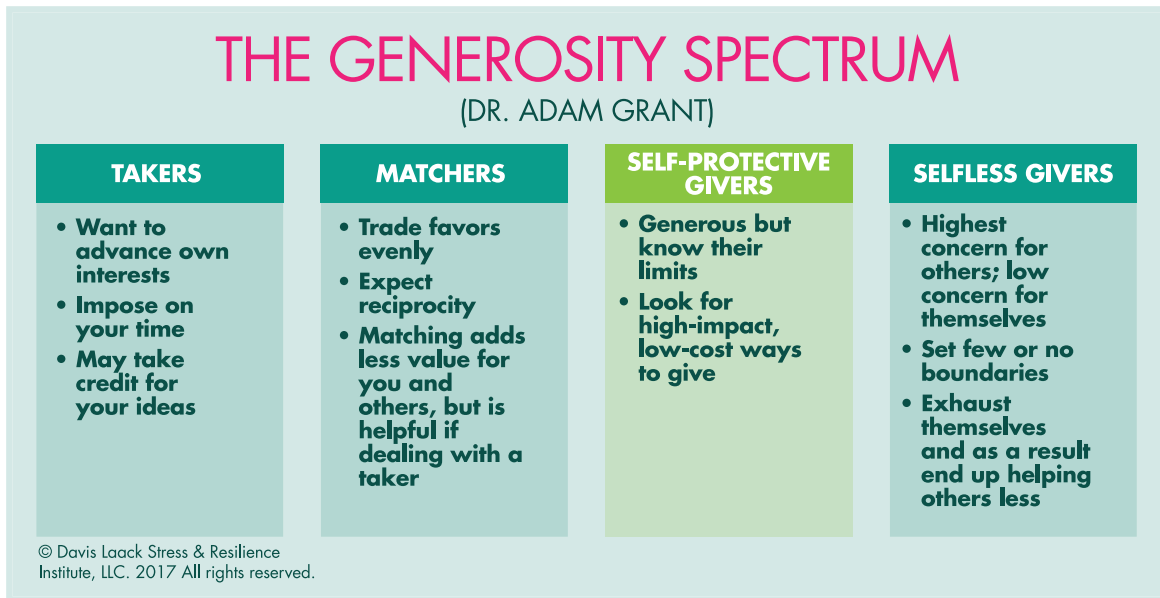
I show this graph in all of my presentations and workshops. I simply ask you to put a dot on the graph where you are today and ask that you check in with yourself on a regular basis (i.e., weekly or monthly; quarterly at minimum) to see if your situation is getting better or worse.



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# SKILL: PREVENT GENEROSITY BURNOUT

Dr. Adam Grant researches peoples' styles of interacting with each other at work, and has created the following classification: <sup>30</sup>



Those of you who consider yourselves to be givers, ask, what kind of giver are you? Selfless givers set few or no boundaries around their energy and exhaust themselves as a result of helping everyone. Adam Grant and his colleagues found that selfless teachers actually saw significantly lower student achievement scores on year-end assessments because these well-intentioned teachers had exhausted themselves trying to help everyone with every request.

## HERE ARE SEVEN WAYS YOU CAN GIVE AND PRESERVE YOUR ENERGY: <sup>31</sup>

1. Prioritize requests for help
2. Give in ways that play to your interests and strengths
3. Refer requests to others when you don't have the time or skills
4. Address your own needs (no more skipping lunch to help someone)
5. Look to help multiple people with a single act of generosity
6. Chunk your giving into dedicated blocks of time
7. Steer clear of takers!

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# CREATE A BIGGER-THAN-SELF GOAL

A bigger-than-self goal is less about the objective goals you have like working a set number of hours; rather, it's more about how you see yourself within your community (which could mean in your company, family, or larger community). When people are connected to bigger-than-self goals, they are more hopeful, curious, grateful and inspired. Not surprisingly, they also show greater well-being and satisfaction with their lives.<sup>32</sup>

Meaning is closely linked with intrinsic motivation, and studies show that not all goals and aspirations are equally beneficial for psychological health and happiness. In one such study, researchers compared adults who chose life goals with extrinsic aspirations (based on money, fame and image) with adults who chose life goals with intrinsic aspirations (personal growth, close relationships, community involvement, and physical health). The adults with intrinsically motivated goals reported higher levels of life satisfaction and well-being and lower levels of anxiety and depression upon goal attainment. The adults with extrinsically motivated goals reported higher levels of anxiety and depression upon goal completion. They thought achieving these “profit” based goals would make them happier, and in the end, it didn't.<sup>33</sup>

Meaning matters in other ways as well. People who believe that their lives have meaning and purpose share a whole host of healthy benefits: they are happier, feel more in control over their lives, feel more engaged at work, report less depression and anxiety and less workaholism.<sup>34</sup>

## WRITE YOUR BIGGER-THAN-SELF GOAL HERE:

Questions to think about in creating a bigger-than-self goal:<sup>35</sup>

1. What do you want to contribute to the world?
2. What change do you want to create?
3. What kind of positive impact do you want to have on the people around you?
4. What mission in life or at work most inspires you?

# CHANGE YOUR PASSWORDS

I started talking about this technique after I read an article about a guy who wanted to forgive his wife after their divorce. He changed his password to forgive@her, and he found it so helpful that he used the technique again to stop smoking. This works because it's a form of priming – helping to activate nonconscious processes (processes that do not require conscious control) to facilitate goal achievement and self-regulation.<sup>36</sup>

**How I use it:** I'm not a fan of setting New Year's resolutions; instead, I create a "word of the year." I choose a word that I want to govern my decisions, my time, and my behavior during the upcoming year. Then I modify my passwords accordingly so that I'm intentionally keeping that word front of mind multiple times each day.

**How others use it:** Here are some examples of how my clients and others have used this technique:

\*\* I talked to a friend of mine about this technique, and she changed her password to "gratitude." Not long after she did this, she lost her job. She said it helped her deal with the negative emotions and other psychological fallout because she was forced to think of instances of gratitude multiple times each day.

\*\* A client said she changed her password to "appreciate@kelly" because Kelly was a valuable member of her team. My client realized that her perfectionistic tendencies were causing other valued members of her team to leave, and she wanted to make sure Kelly stayed.

\*\* Clients have changed their passwords to reflect weight loss goals (e.g., "lose10pounds"), vacation dreams (e.g., "gotoParis") and generally wanting more positivity in their lives.

# BUILD MORE HIGH-QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS

High-quality connections have four foundational elements: respectful engagement, task enabling, trust and play (you can be your authentic self).<sup>37</sup> Here are specific ways to develop each component. Once you review, answer the questions below.

RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT	TASK ENABLING	TRUST	PLAY
1. Convey presence (turn off or close phones, computers; look up & acknowledge)	1. Assign and use mentors/coaches	1. Common ground (we have similar values and objectives)	1. Incorporate more positive emotions into your diet
2. Effective listening	2. Recognition and feedback	2. Predictability (I can predict your behavior)	2. Add team/family building activities
3. Supportive communication	3. Clear task instructions, goals & outcomes	3. Consideration (you will consider my needs before you act)	3. Volunteer opportunities you can do as a team/family?
		4. Forewarning (you'll tell me 1st before acting in a way that is not in my best interest)	

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Which element seems easiest to address/build? What strategies will you use and how?

Which element is the biggest roadblock for you? Your team? Your family? Why?

What team/family activities will you add?



# QUICK STRATEGIES TO BUST THE 6 MOST COMMON STRESSORS

I became a mom nearly one year ago, and my world is now filled with enormous amounts of both love and stress. The past year has been full of all kinds of new feelings, too little sleep, and making sure that my business continued to grow during my maternity leave required military-like precision and focus. I know so many of you are overwhelmed as you try to make all of the pieces of your life puzzle fit together with some level of sanity.

According to a Harvard Health Publications article,<sup>38</sup> many of us keep bumping into the same stressors as we manage the hectic pace of our lives. Here are six of the most common stressors, and I've added a few quick tips to help you boost your stress resilience.

## 1. You are frequently late.

### Strategies:

- Identify the underlying issue at the core of your lateness. Are you feeling a lack of confidence as you work on a new project? Lack of confidence can mask as procrastination. Are you feeling guilty about having to confront a friend about something so you keep postponing lunch? Once you address the root cause of your tardiness, you'll feel better.
- Schedule a huddle with your team (at work) and your family (at home) to visualize your day. What challenges are you expecting and how will you handle them?

## 2. You are often angry or frustrated.

### Strategies:

- Set better boundaries. In a wonderful video, Brené Brown explains why boundaries are so tightly connected to compassion (for both yourself and others) and empathy.<sup>39</sup> After watching it, I realized that my failure to set solid boundaries was the reason behind much of my anger and frustration with certain people and situations, and I really had nobody to blame but myself.
- Practice progressive muscle relaxation, which is the process of tensing, then relaxing, individual muscle groups.



### 3. You are unsure of your ability to do something.

#### **Strategies:**

- Close the confidence gap by identifying and using your strengths. Leveraging what you already do well will help you navigate new territory. You can take a free strengths assessment at [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org).
- Increase your self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that you can produce results in your life and accomplish your goals. Research shows that one of the best ways to build your self-efficacy is to leverage small victories, so start by writing down your “wins.” Reflecting on past successes will help you enhance the belief that you can conquer this new challenge.

### 4. You feel lonely.

#### **Strategies:**

- Notice how your inner critic influences your feelings of loneliness (for example, you might think, “Everybody my age is in a relationship – why should I bother even going out tonight?”) Ask yourself the following question to help you reframe your thinking: “What would I tell a friend, family member, or child if they were experiencing the same issue?”
- Identify groups that connect with your values and strengths and reach out to ask about volunteer opportunities.
- Get curious about other people. Rather than focusing on your feelings of loneliness, reach out to a friend, neighbor or co-worker and invite them to lunch. Showing an interest in another person is a great way to start developing a friendship.

### 5. You are burned out.

#### **Strategies:**

- Ask yourself whether you’re over-experiencing too many high-intensity positive emotions. Positive emotions have been shown to build your stress resilience, but you can have too much of a good thing.<sup>40</sup> Feeling consistently amped up or pumped can be hard on your body by consistently activating your body’s stress response.
- Get really clear on what you value and ask yourself whether there is a big disconnect between your values (family time, for example) and what is valued where you work (you are expected to answer emails even at 3am). Large values disconnects can be big drivers of burnout at work.

## 6. You are overextended.

### **Strategies:**

- Having a busy life is great, but busyness needs to be intentional and purposeful in order to be productive. What are your short-term and long-term goals, and will saying yes to chairing that new committee get you closer to accomplishing those goals?
- Understand that “no” is a complete sentence. Women in particular often feel the need to give five explanations for why they can’t do something, and the problem is that others often expect the explanation. Saying “no” and leaving it is really all you need to say in many situations. You can read more about how to say no and still get ahead in my Forbes post on the topic: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauladavislaack/2016/08/24/how-to-say-no-and-still-get-ahead-without-guilt/#4a328f4846d1>
- Get out of the weeds by establishing systems. Good systems are crucial to success in the workplace, and the idea is transferable to non-work. Good systems are fluid, measurable, and can and should be changed as your methods are established or as missing pieces are learned.
- Identify areas where perfectionism is holding you back. If your motto is, “If I want this done right I have to do it myself,” then perfectionism may be preventing you from delegating to others.

# A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ME...

On June 24, 2009, I left my law practice to go back to school and start a new business. I had burned out over the course of about a year and was anxious to try something new. Based on my own experience, I decided to study stress and burnout and develop strategies for busy professionals to build their resilience to stress. That led me to the University of Pennsylvania's master of applied positive psychology program where I researched the science of resilience and studied under the leading experts in the field.

I received my post-graduate training working for the University of Pennsylvania teaching and training resilience skills to soldiers in the U.S. Army and their spouses as part of the Army's Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness program. Our training team trained more than 25,000 soldiers in five years. It was life changing to be part of such a meaningful program and to work with my real-life heroes.

Once the Army project ended, I was able to devote my time and efforts to my business full-time, teaching and translating the science of resilience and well-being into workshops, e-books and blog posts, speaking programs, and train-the-trainer programs for busy professionals in healthcare, the legal profession and many other helping professions.

My work is regularly featured on my blogs in *The Huffington Post*, *Forbes*, *Psychology Today* and Fast Company. I am the author of three e-books, *10 Things Happy People Do Differently*, *Addicted to Busy: Your Blueprint for Burnout Prevention*, and *STRONG: Stress Relief Strategies When You Have 10 Minutes or Less*. I am set to co-author a chapter about the efficacy of teaching burnout prevention and resilience skills to medical students in the forthcoming book, *Relational and Appreciative Practices in Healthcare*. I am also authoring a chapter about resilience in a forthcoming book on well-being in the legal profession to be published by the American Bar Association.

My expertise has been featured in and on *O, The Oprah Magazine*, *Redbook*, Time.com, Today.com, *Women's Health* magazine, The Steve Harvey TV show, Huffington Post Live and a variety of media outlets.

Professionally, I am the Founder and CEO of the Stress & Resilience Institute, a training and consulting firm that partners with law firms, healthcare and other organizations to identify and address burnout and increase the well-being and stress resilience in the workplace ([www.stressandresilience.com](http://www.stressandresilience.com)). I regularly publish e-books, blog posts, and e-courses for busy professionals and to disseminate my STRONG strategies – **ST**ress **R**esilience **ON** the **G**o.

Personally, I am a mom to a happy, silly and beautiful one-year old named Lucy. My journey to motherhood has been very complex, both from a physical and emotional standpoint. I spent many years thinking that motherhood just wasn't in the cards for me. When I realized how much I was longing to be a mom, I knew my life wouldn't be the same without that opportunity. After two rounds of failed IVF and fertility treatments, we decided to pursue adoption. The last four years have been filled with the biggest ups and downs of my life, so I understand how stressful life can get. My love of sports, regular exercise (particularly kickboxing), and my faithful companions, golden retrievers Sadie and Zoey, have helped me manage the chaos. I remain devoted to my sports teams, the Green Bay Packers and Chicago Cubs, even when it seems like they are trying to accelerate my aging.

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The logo for the Stress & Resilience Institute, featuring the word "STRONG" in a bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: S (orange), T (green), R (blue), E (red), S (purple), I (yellow), N (pink), G (grey).

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