

Stress: Good, Bad and Ugly

By Dr. David McDeavitt



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Dr. McDeavitt received a Bachelor of Science in health and physical education from Slippery Rock University and a Master of Education, K-12 Principal Certification and Superintendent's Letter of Eligibility from Gannon University. He earned his doctorate through the Educational Leadership Doctoral Degree program at Drexel University.

Stress and the administrator's role are synonymous of one another. A recent article that was written for *Education Week* showed that nearly half of principals leave their position after three years (Superville, 2019). Nearly one in five principals leave their school each year, with the average building leader's tenure lasting about four years, says a new report from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2020).

The stress associated with the principal position is the root cause of the departures. There is no real good way to reduce the stress associated with this position, but there are ways to manage the stress and remain healthy and effective. This process starts with knowing how to differentiate between good stress and bad stress.

As I am sure, you are all aware; there are many negative effects that stress and worry has on our wellbeing. Khansarie, et al., (1990) shows that stress, distress, and notably the affective stress are associated with immunosuppression. More recent studies clearly show that there is a strong relationship between stress and several disorders that include inflammation, metabolic, reproductive, and autoimmune diseases (Cakmur, 2020). Many of us can easily identify with how a negative stressor affects our emotions and on the contrary, the right amount of good stress can elicit a eustress response that may benefit our health, cognition and wellbeing.

The intensity of the stressor is a key factor in determining the stress response, and individual's mindset could be a resource in endorsing a eustress response. Moreover, a stress-is-enhancing (SIE) mindset advocates the belief that experiencing stress has enhancing consequences for performance, while a stress-is-debilitating (SID) mindset appraises these consequences to be debilitating (Bosman, 2019). The SIE mindset is linked to a eustress response, which is considered a positive response toward our overall wellbeing.

Seeger (2019) believes eustress is a healthy, positive and constructive response to a stressful event and can actually improve performance, health and well-being. Items such as a board meeting could be considered a eustress that would be enough to enhance the preparation period that will result in a successful meeting.

To promote the capacity to handle stress in a positive way, we should rise early in the morning and exercise. This is one way to enhance our well-being and provide a roadway to cope with stressful situations during the day. Morning exercise coupled with a nutritional plan comprised of fresh food and lean proteins help to promote healthy cells in the body are used to combat stress and the release of cortisone.

Even though taking care of yourself is important and can actually improve overall effectiveness on the job, it is simply hard to accomplish. Research has shown ways to build wellness into the work and family balance; start by focusing on boosting physical, emotional and cognitive energy through exercise and a balanced diet (Chakmur, 2020).

Ideas for increasing your ability to reduce stress are below:

- **Limit multitasking:** Research shows that multi-tasking actually diminishes productivity.
- **Healthy rituals:** Set some healthy rituals and stick to them, go to bed at the same time each night.

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- **Stop unhealthy lifestyles factors:** Pick one thing and STOP doing it.
- **Set and stick to a schedule:** Learn how to delegate a committee role to someone else.
- **Make meetings matter:** Many times, meetings do not start on time and last too long, make it a point to start on time and keep all meetings under one hour.
- **Relationships matter:** Greet students and staff in the morning with a big smile.
- **Relax:** Finding a good book, going for a walk and spending time with family are all good suggestions for reducing stress.

For additional information, contact Dr. McDeavitt at david.mcdeavitt@acvsd.org

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