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THE 6 MOST
EFFECTIVE
PRINCIPALS FOR
STRESS
MANAGEMENT

by

DR MAHENDRA PERERA



*Stress is a ubiquitous
phenomenon;
part of the fabric of everyday life*

INTRODUCTION

Stress is often seen as an entirely negative experience. It's true that a degree of comfort is required for our well-being and many would love to live their lives 'stress-free'. However, this may not always be possible, and may I dare say necessary – or even healthy.

Humans are programmed to experience opposites. It is the darkness of the night that makes us aware of the light of day. We need both components to live a healthy life – both night and day.

I've gathered together 6 principals to help you effectively manage stress in your life. Your work, life, health and well-being will all benefit from following just a few of these principals for stress management.

Let's dive right in:

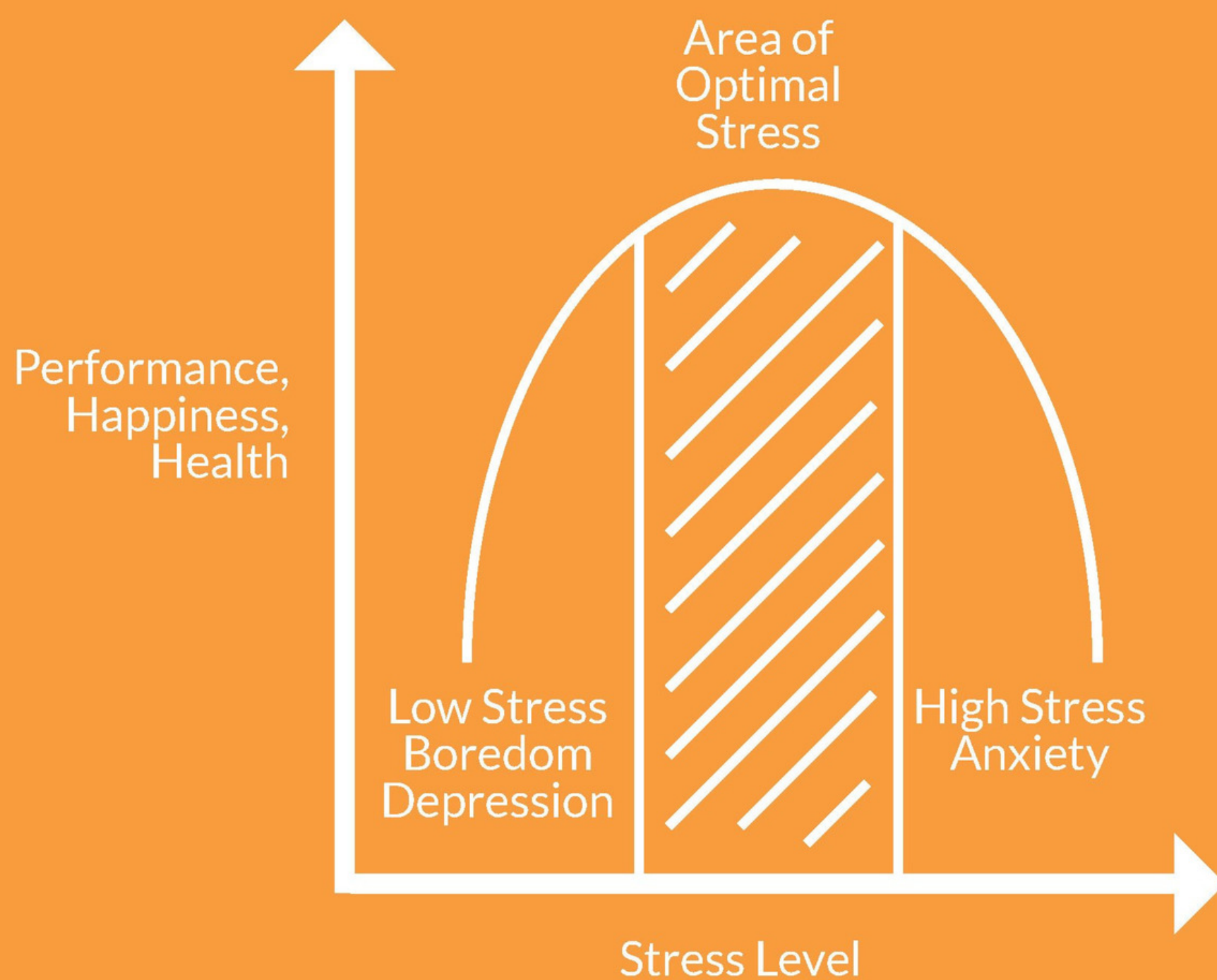
01

PRINCIPLE

YOU NEED TO DETERMINE WHAT YOUR
OPTIMAL LEVEL OF STRESS IS. TRY TO
MAINTAIN IT AT THAT LEVEL.

You need to determine what your optimal level of stress is. Try to maintain it at that level.

In the same way that the night blends into the day, you can conceptualise stress on a continuum, with low stress on one end and high stress on the other.



Yerkes-Dodson Law or Inverted-U model


As you can see in the diagram (also known as the Yerkes-Dodson Law or Inverted-U model) we need some amount of stress to perform at our best. Unfortunately, we are not always able to determine the ‘sweet spot’ for stress in our lives – shown in the diagram as the “Area of Optimal Stress”.

Your long-term goal is to manage a healthy amount of stress that keeps you actively engaged in your work without having a negative impact on your well-being.


02

PRINCIPLE

**DO A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS. CONSIDER
THE LONGER TERM CONSEQUENCES OF
YOUR ACTIONS.**



*Do a cost-benefit analysis.
Consider the longer term
consequences of your
actions.*



For most of us, daily life can be stressful and we tend to have more stress in our lives rather than less. In the arena of work, it is said that 1 person does the work of 3 and gets 2x's the salary. Earning twice your usual pay is lucrative from a financial point of view and some may say it is essential in this day and age. My words of caution are:

STOP!

Consider the cost to yourself. Aren't you burning the candle at both ends? Too much stress is not healthy and will ultimately lead to a drop in productivity. Look at ways to reduce your stress and bring it into the 'sweet spot'.

03

PRINCIPLE

**TAKE MINI BREAKS WHILE WORKING. THIS
WILL HELP EASE THE TENSION.**

Take mini breaks while working. This will help ease the tension.



How can you reduce your stress with the burden of overwork and underpay? There is no silver bullet to answer the question.

However, there are some techniques you can use to help ease stress throughout the day. Here are a few starting points, choose what works best for you:

- **Take time for yourself.** In a busy work place, you can always take a 5-min toilet break, or a walk to the water cooler.
- **Remember, you can do stretches while seated and some have their desks so that they can work standing up.**

- If your work involves looking at the computer screen for long periods of time – and now most jobs do – then take a few seconds to take your eyes away from the screen periodically to look into the distance. This will relax your eye, head and neck musculature.

- When you take your lunch break, be sure to take the time to enjoy your food, and not continue working through your meal.

These are only a few techniques you can employ while you are working. You can also listen to music on a break, or read a portion of a favourite book.

04

PRINCIPLE

**WORK SMART; THIS CERTAINLY INCLUDES
HARD WORK BUT WITH DUE DILIGENCE.**

Work smart; this certainly includes hard work but with due diligence.



Are you a Type A personality or a workaholic, who prides him/herself on working long hours? If so for whose benefit is this? I am not advocating that you should only do the bare minimum – a work-to-rule. Nor am I saying that you should not go the extra mile occasionally. The key word is occasionally.

A work-to-rule almost defies the purpose of gainful employment. Many people work late (unpaid overtime) and if you leave early every day you probably would lose your job! Jokes aside, these are genuine concerns in this hire and fire era. In my view, an efficient employee is much more valuable than someone who is struggling with their allotted tasks.

05

PRINCIPLE

PUNCTUALITY: MAKE IT A RELAXED HABIT

Punctuality: make it a relaxed habit.



Following from the approach of being efficient, punctuality should be your guiding light. This is where planning comes in. Getting to work on time regularly is an asset that requires forethought and planning to make it a habit.

One important consideration is that it should be a routine and rush free. Come in so that you are fresh and ready to run the marathon rather than as if you have already run it!! When you arrive on time and ready for the day ahead, what follows is that you will get on with the tasks at hand and be able to leave punctually as well.

06

PRINCIPLE

HAVE WATERTIGHT COMPARTMENTS FOR
WORK AND LIFE OUTSIDE WORK.

Have watertight compartments for work and life outside work.



We spend a significant proportion of each day at work. The rest is typically spent with family, friends and by ourselves engaged in activities of daily living. Life outside work possesses its own set of challenges and can potentially be draining. Sometimes problems of daily life can be more stressful than the problems at work.

Being human, it is difficult to shut off our thought processes. Hence, like night fading into day and day into night, we can carry over stress from different areas of our life into others, including our work – all of which exponentially increasing our troubles.

This is where you can implement the STOP sign or traffic light strategy: Red is STOP. Green is GO. When you come into work, you need to leave behind the cares of home behind. STOP after you leave home. Then, GO when you enter the workplace.

Similarly, when you leave work use the STOP sign first. Take a break (amber) and then GO when you enter your abode.

It is said that, “One man’s meat is another man’s poison”. Looking at the adage differently, stress can be conceptualised as a perception.

For the farmer who is waiting for the rain it is a blessing, but for the holiday maker who was hoping to have bright sunshine the rain is a disappointment. We need to understand that it is not the situation that results in stress but how we perceive it. It’s like NEWS. News is news (pardon the tautology). Whether it is good or bad depends on the interpretation we give it.

Hence, a situation that one is faced with, however cumbersome it may be, could be viewed as a painful experience or an opportunity to gain further understanding. It is not that one should take a Polyanna-like attitude, but a realistic thought process can help you see which situations deserve urgency and which are not worth getting stressed about.

Life goes on. I urge you to be at peace with yourself. I will end this with the following lyrics:

*Row, row row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a Dream*

Dr Mahendra Perera is a
consultant psychiatrist, author,
and motivational speaker,
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