



# KEEPING CALM IN A CRISIS

PART OF THE MORGAN REDWOOD  
INSIGHTS SERIES



## Keeping calm in a crisis

*For those of us old enough to remember the television series Dad's Army – “Don't panic Mr Mannering” was one of Spike's main lines – and one of my favourites. But how do we keep calm in a crisis? And how do we deal with the stressful things that come our way?*

Stress is a tricky thing. It means different things to different people. And what is motivating to one person can be stressful to someone else. Put simply, stress is an emotional reaction to physical, psychological or emotional demands that are placed on us.

There are so many symptoms for stress. If you did a search on the internet you would get quite a long list – physical symptoms, behavioural, emotional and cognitive.

### The Symptoms

Symptoms can include increased irritability, severe mood changes, lack of concentration, black and white thinking, difficulty making decisions, being argumentative, losing your temper quickly, feeling overwhelmed, catching frequent colds or illness, trouble sleeping, tiredness, low or depressed mood, lack of energy, headaches, muscle tension, trouble relaxing, using stimulants such as alcohol to wind down and so on and so on. The list goes on.

There are so many things in fact, that no matter how fantastic things are at the moment, most of us would be able to put our hand up to experiencing several of them right now – but that doesn't mean that we are 'stressed'.

### So, what happens to us in times of stress?

The stress response triggers adrenaline in the body; it is what gets us going, it stimulates the 'fight, flight or freeze' reaction in the body. Appropriate all those years ago maybe when we were running across the fields searching for food being chased by a rather large animal – but not so appropriate now.

The stress response can actually lead us to do or say all sorts of things as a reaction to what is going on around us. It is basically there to keep us safe – to protect us; to stir us into an appropriate reaction.

If you feel like you might be experiencing high levels of stress in your life at the moment, the key is to understand what stress feels like for you; when things start to tip into overwhelm or you are feeling a little bit out of control. Understand what that feels like to you – the trick to that is getting out of your head and recognising the feelings in your body. Not easily done when we spend so much time in our heads – particularly if you are in a very busy period in your life with lots of demands being placed on you. Recognise the symptoms and how you are feeling, and recognise them before they get to a level where it is all too much.

The stress response triggers adrenaline. It is adrenaline that gets us going, and keeps us motivated to do things. Looking at it a different way then, stress is actually motivation!

Things only become stressful when we exceed our personal capacity to be able to cope.

How do we learn how to cope? The key to boosting our resilience levels is to get regular exercise, have a healthy diet – including drinking plenty of water – and to keep our mind in a calm place! Here are three quick tips...

## 1. Relax

Relaxation – some of us are good at it – some of us not. I know several people who just ‘don’t do’ relaxation.

It is an essential element in building up our resilience levels and our capacity for coping – for managing the stresses and strains in our lives.

Finding yourself with nothing to do – or an opportunity to sit quietly is a fantastic thing to experience. If that makes you feel bored – then sit with the boredom. I challenge you to not fill the time with something – to just sit and experience the boredom! You might be surprised, out of boredom can come breakthroughs. Out of sitting in boredom, without things planned in, can allow the space in our lives for creativity and new things to enter.

## 2. Breathe

We all have to breathe – it’s what keeps us alive. But surprise, surprise, most of us don’t do it properly. Most of us keep our breathing at the top of our chest; a shallow breath. Particularly when we are busy, anxious or just caught up in ‘stuff’, we take shallow breaths.

Learning how to make full use of the breath is an incredible way, not only to relax, but also to boost your energy levels, control your emotions and achieve a sense of calm and peacefulness.

So, try a different approach. Try a deeper breath and see how you feel. Experience the difference.

There are a few parts to this that build up – give it a go.

### *a.) Full belly breathing*

Place your hands on your belly – now take a deep breath in through the nose. As you breath in – feel your belly rise and as you breath out through your mouth – your belly will go back down.

By doing this you are opening up your diaphragm and allowing all your organs to get a lovely stretch and loads more oxygen into the bargain. This means an increase in energy and vitality, so it’s silly not to really!

### *b.) 7:11 breathing*

7:11 breathing is a great way to relax and great to practice at all times. It’s also great to calm the nerves before a meeting, presentation, interview, or in a crisis.

Breath in for 7 and out for 11 – easy! Find a count that’s comfortable for you. Maybe in for 4 and out for 6 or 7 but make sure that your out breath is longer than the in-breath. Added benefits are that counting distracts your mind away from its

problems, and by breathing out for longer you will automatically induce the relaxation response in your body. Your body will have no alternative than to calm down.

### **3. Visualise**

Some people don't rate visualisation, but many people do.

Most athletes and top sports people are very open about how they practice their events in their mind. How they keep practicing, visualising, seeing themselves doing well – getting better, stronger, winning.

Visualisation is a great way to support yourself in bringing things into reality and coping with stress. Start by picturing what you want to achieve – then see yourself achieving it. Seeing yourself achieving things, even in your mind's eye, will boost your motivation. Your brain will record and recollect it. You will be improving your belief in yourself.

Building your resilience levels up will leave you better placed to deal with whatever comes your way. Doing that will enable you to manage your personal stress levels so you keep calm in any crisis.



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