

Staying Calm Under Pressure Says a Lot About a Leader

The ability to manage your emotions and remain calm under pressure has a direct link to your performance. Research tells us that 90% of top performers are skilled at managing their emotions in times of stress in order to remain calm and in control.

The tricky thing about the anxiety that comes with stress is that it's an absolutely necessary emotion. In fact, performance peaks under the heightened activation that comes with moderate levels of stress. As long as the stress isn't prolonged, it is harmless.

Top performers have well-honed coping strategies that they employ under stressful circumstances. This lowers their stress levels regardless of what's happening in their environment, ensuring that the stress they experience is intermittent and not prolonged.

While we have all run across numerous effective strategies that successful people employ when faced with stress, what follows are five of the best strategies. Some of these strategies may seem obvious, but the real challenge lies in recognizing when you need to use them and having the means to actually do so in spite of your stress.

Appreciate what you have – Taking the time to contemplate what you're grateful for isn't merely the "right" thing to do, it also improves your mood because it reduces the stress hormone cortisol.

Avoid asking "What if?" – "What if?" statements throw fuel on the fire of stress and worry. Things can go in a million different directions, and the more time you spend worrying about the possibilities, the less time you'll spend focusing on taking action that will calm you down and keep your stress under control.

Stay positive – Positive thoughts help make stress intermittent by focusing your attention onto something that is completely stress-free. You have to

give your wandering brain a little help by consciously selecting something positive to think about. Any positive thought will do to refocus your attention. When things are going well, and your mood is good, this is relatively easy. When things are going poorly, and your mind is flooded with negative thoughts, this can be a challenge. In these moments, think about your day and identify one positive thing that happened, no matter how small. If you can't think of something from the current day, reflect on the previous day or even the previous week. Or perhaps you're looking forward to an exciting event that you can focus your attention on. The point here is that you must have something positive that you're ready to shift your attention to when your thoughts turn negative.

Squash negative self-talk – A big step in managing stress involves stopping negative self-talk in its tracks. The more you ruminate on negative thoughts, the more power you give them. Most of our negative thoughts are just that – thoughts, not facts.

Reframe your perspective – Stress and worry are fueled by our own skewed perception of events. It is easy to think that unrealistic deadlines, unforgiving bosses, and out of control traffic are the reasons we're so stressed all the time. You can't control many circumstances, but you can control how you respond to them. So before you spend too much time dwelling on something, take a minute to put the situation in perspective. If you aren't sure when you need to do this, try looking for clues that your anxiety may not be proportional to the stressor. If you're thinking in broad, sweeping statements such as, "Everything is going wrong" or "Nothing will work out", then you need to reframe the situation.

And remember, anyone can stay calm when things are going well. The person who doesn't lose their cool is the one who is remembered in a positive way, as the leader people want to follow.