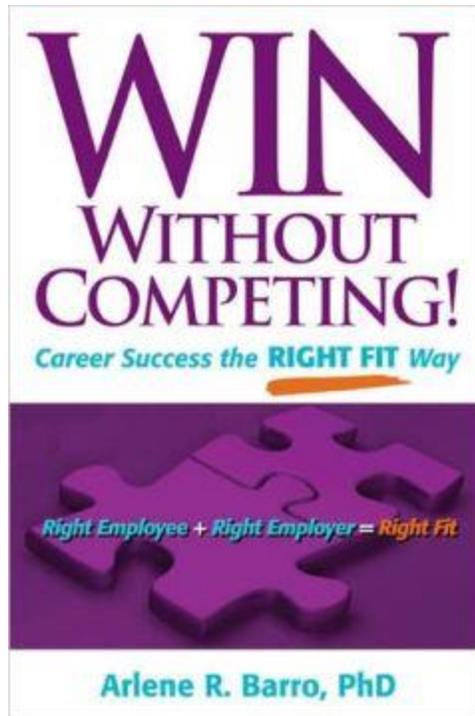


Conquering Stress! With Dr. Arlene – Stress Avoidance Causes Stress



Posted Thursday, June 6, 2019 - 7:05 pm

by **Dr. Arlene Barro**

Stress is a global epidemic. Are we walking down the Stress on Steroids Road? If we continue on that treacherous journey, we will not be fit to function. Switch to the Stress-Busters Road. Then, immediately stop all negative self-talk focused on stress avoidance. Gradually, your mind, brain, and body will make significant changes, as you behave differently. Watch your new self emerge.

Smorgasbord of Stressors

Imagine a hotel dining room filled with beautiful buffet brunch tables. Instead of sumptuous food, you have a smorgasbord of stressors: external and internal. Make a list of those stressors that you have. Shortly, I will explain what to do next.

External Stressors

- Environmental Stressors — Extreme noise, traffic gridlock, crowds, other types of pollution.

- **Social Stressors** — Interaction with people including: family, friends, co-workers, bosses, customer service reps, and neighbors. They can all ratchet up stress. Happy events including: wedding planning, getting married, getting a job and having a baby.
- **Life-Changing Events** — Unhappy events including: family member dies, divorce, job loss, accident, house fire, robbery, natural disasters, e.g., earthquakes and tornadoes.
- **Demands of Everyday Living** — Paying bills, doing taxes, losing keys or wallet. Social system with rules and regulations that pressure us. Deadlines, non-stop emails, and office politics.

Internal Stressors

We create our own stress: excessive worry, negativity, planning poorly, setting artificial deadlines for ourselves, visualizing worst case scenarios, fearing failure, fearing what others think including social media interactions.

The categorization of stressors was excerpted and adapted from *Your Internal Stressors: The Repercussions of Ignoring Stressors*, 2019, universalclass.com.

Negative Self-Talk is a major stress trigger. If you worry about things that might happen, you are anticipating stress. If you become stressed about things that do not turn out as you planned, you are making erroneous assumptions which can cause stress.

We need to learn how to manage those stressors that we can control. For those that we cannot control, our response to the situation will test our ability to manage stress. Let us set the stage now to do that.

Stop Stress Avoidance

Does the number of stressors that you have surprise you? I displayed the smorgasbord to invite you to see face-to-face, so to speak, what is igniting your stress. If you have been ignoring, avoiding, denying or until now not recognizing stressors and stress symptoms and how they interact, now is the time to do that. First, accept that you have stress which will make you feel better. Second, create a program to manage your stress.

Read the list of my column titles in the *bhcourier.com* archives. Select the strategies, which I fondly refer to as my Stress-Busters, that match your particular situation. Then, start practicing each strategy, one at a time. If you allow stress to manage you, then you are increasing your risk for chronic disease. Say no to that.

Maureen Connolly and Margaret Slade conducted a fascinating study, *Special Report: United States of Stress*, medically reviewed by Allison Young, M.D., May 7, 2019, EverydayHealth.com.

They surveyed 6,700 Americans between the ages of 18-64. They concluded the following:

- We need effective stress management programs. Americans avoid managing stress.
- We need effective stress management programs. Americans avoid managing stress.
- Meditation was rated particularly low.
- Yoga has been shown to lengthen the protective caps at the ends of our DNA strands which keep us more youthful. Ongoing stress can negatively change the DNA.
- Social isolation is killing us.
- Loneliness increases our cortisol hormone which disrupts our sleep, causes poor immune functioning, higher blood pressure, depression, cognitive decline and dementia.
- Men and women should see friends regularly. Women, in particular, will benefit because they will increase their oxytocin, which helps to reduce stress.
- Social media can turn into a source of toxic stress.

To learn more about the results of this study, I recommend reading the Special Report.

Instant Stress Relief

Laughter is an instant Stress-Buster! The Mayo Clinic reports that laughter can ignite both short-term and long-term physical changes in our body that fight pain and relax us. Laughing sounds easy. Apparently, lots of people do not laugh. Why not?

At the University College in London, Professor Sophie Scott, neuroscientist, psychologist, and comic, observed the absence of laughter. She reports what she learned in *10 Things You May Not Know About Laughter*, October 26, 2014, *bbc.com*.

Scott studied the laughing behavior of rats, chimps, and dogs. Yes, they all laugh. The rats' behavior is similar to humans. Those rats that played more, laughed more.

Scott discusses Robert Prince's research, a psychologist from the University of Maryland. He found that laughter had more to do with social interaction rather than a reaction to a joke. He reviewed brain imaging scans. He found out that the brain can differentiate between staged laughter and the real thing. Surprisingly, the staged laughter produces more activity in the part of the brain involved in emotion than

real laughter. Prince further determined that laughter is contagious. That is why comics warm-up their audiences.

Scott said that we rate strangers as more attractive, when they laugh at our jokes. Berkeley psychologist Professor Bob Levenson, from his couples' research, learned that relationships last longer when you laugh together.

Consciously seek out more social interaction and enjoy laughing with others. When I am driving, I also enjoy laughing to relax my body. Try making yourself laugh to distract yourself from the traffic.

To find the Right Fit Stress-Busters for you, I recommend that you start reading these columns: *Not Laughing Causes Stress* (2018, 04, 12), *Unfinished Business Causes Stress* (2018, 09, 05), *Cluttered Minds Cause Stress* (2017, 05, 07), *Anxiety Provoking Self-Talk Causes Stress* (2019, 03, 07), *Steve Jobs' Unique Decisions Cause Stress* (2019, 05, 02). There are always more columns to read.

Replacing Stress with Strategy will:

- Decrease chronic fatigue, increase energy.
- Reduce disease risk, increase immunity.
- Declutter muddled minds, increase brain power.

You have the Stress-Busting Strategies to manage your stress. I know you can do it.

Questions about this column? Email drbarro@barroglobal.com.

Dr. Arlene Barro, the creator of the Right Fit Method, is a UCLA-trained behavioral educational psychologist and professional speaker. She is the author of "WIN Without Competing!," a business, career, and personal strategist focusing on success and stress. Founder/CEO of barro global search, inc. at 10940 Wilshire Boulevard, Westwood. Episodes of her radio show are available at www.winwithoutcompeting.com