



Just a small warning in advance

Before you start reading this book, it might be helpful to know that it's usually not just because of that bad boss, that stupid colleague, those complaining employees, that deadline, that meddling mother-in-law, that nosy neighbor, those impossible school hours or those demanding clients. The problem is also not stress as such. It mainly lies in the choices you make yourself.

As coaches, researchers, trainers, employees, fans and major consumers of stress, we are convinced that you can lead a healthier and happier life if you have a better understanding of what stress actually is. Because stress is great. It is the engine that keeps us going and the driving force that enables us to get things done. And when really necessary: a lifesaver that gives us superpowers. This is why we love stress (under certain conditions, of course).

We are not the first ones to write about this topic, or even the most brilliant specialists. But we are the first to demonstrate how the various stress factors interact, how you can influence this, and that stress also has its fun sides.

A lot of people have contributed to this book – people who have (had) to deal with stress in a variety of ways. We have placed all useful insights together on a solid foundation of scientific theories and views from the world of sports, business management, biochemistry, relationship therapy, neurology psychology and related fields. You are holding the result in your hands: a book packed with surprising insights, but also useful facts and trivia, recognizable anecdotes, and tips.

Sources of information have been carefully selected, but of course it always comes down to interpreting the available data. For purposes of readability, we have not included all information. In this book we therefore do not claim to be 100% complete. We have, however, given our full 100% to provide you with a better overview and the clearest possible insights.

After reading this book, you will also be a bit of a stress expert. This is how we aim to help you from using up your energy reserves to the point that you are running on fumes. And, if you should find yourself unexpectedly 'wiped out', then we will help you get back on your feet, step by step.

Enjoy,
Suzan & Carolien

Section

1

Allow Us to Introduce The Power of Stress

1.

Stress, What Is It Exactly?

"Hi, this is Robin of Business News Radio (BNR). How do you feel about making a guest appearance on the Jörgen Raymann radio program 'Ask Me Anything'? You will have an hour to answer listeners' questions about stress, live."

Of course we would love to do that. We love stress, you see. We blog about it, talk about it all the time, offer training programs and a lot of lectures on it, have written this book about it and have an uninvited and ridiculous amount of experience with it in our private lives. We are heavy users of stress. So, when Robin calls, we say 'yes'. Because stress is a-ma-zing. It makes you think and move faster, it makes you sharper and more alert. It gives you an impressive amount of energy. Stress allows us to adapt to situations at lightning speed. Who would not want more of that?

Yet, when we talk about stress, it is often negatively. Which is unfair, because it's really working hard for us. We just use it in the wrong way, unintentionally causing huge problems and giving stress a bad rap.

We all have stress, but it does not affect everyone in the same way. We will now try to tell you why that is.

7.

Why You Can't Slow Down

have the time for it.....
The right moment to relax is when you don't

Sydney J. Harris

'Everyone saw it coming, except for me.' Vera (a 32-year-old client with burnout).

Here are 10 underlying rules why it is so hard to slow down, or to help others slow down:

1. Stress is nice

Many people experience stress as something pleasant. It mobilizes energy and provides you with superpowers. It gives you that wonderful I-can-take-on-the-whole-world feeling. Stress allows you to exceed yourself and deliver peak performance, day after day. You are at your very best. You are able to work hard, adapt quickly, and keep up the pace – and you enjoy it. You could say that stress makes you the best version of yourself. You 2.0! Of course you don't want to stop; things are going so well.

2. The brakes are wearing thin

When the STRESS Department hires in extra forces, your stress levels increase, causing your brakes to wear thin. As a consequence, your stress reactions become more intense, and last

Work Till You Drop

Seventy percent of all sickness-related absence from work in the Netherlands is caused by stress – or to state it even more clearly: insufficient time to rest and reload. This is a huge percentage. Yet it remains difficult to take the necessary measures. Hints – given by colleagues, managers, partners, friends, or family members – that it might be time to take it a little bit easier because they are worried, are steadfastly ignored or pushed aside with the classic words 'it's not so bad' (often accompanied by a dismissive hand wave). It is extremely difficult to jump out of a high-speed train. Precisely because you are under the influence of stress hormones, you find it hard to slow down. To the contrary: you often take on a little more. And a little more. And a little more. Until you are sitting at home, exhausted and barely able to lift a finger.

section

2

Main Suppliers of Stress Charging Stations

If you constantly experience (very high) pressure, the RECOVERY Department barely gets to do its job. You might be lulled into thinking that things are going well, though – until you start developing a few vague stress-related issues. There are a variety of Main Suppliers to keep the STRESS Department going. Here, we list 14 of them. This does not mean, however, that they all remain neatly in their place in the list: they collaborate in a variety of ways and keep calling on each other. Complicated? Sometimes. Hard to temper? Not at all. We will show you how you can (re)gain control and activate the Suppliers of RECOVERY. We will start by sharing one thing with you, namely what all the Main Suppliers have in common: their departure point is always a sense of unsafety.

The 14 Main Suppliers of Stress

1. Work pressure (loads of work)
2. Exhausting lifestyle (we all think we're Superman or Superwoman)
3. Negative prejudices about yourself (insecure)
4. Shaky self-confidence (you give it our all, just to obtain recognition)
5. What if... (preparing for anticipated problems)
6. Pressure to perform (being dependent on the wrong type of success)
7. Out-of-control perfectionism (very demanding)
8. Rigid thoughts (fixed mindset)
9. Problem-oriented subtitles (negative interpretations)
10. Unhealthy relationships (at home and at work)
11. Impossible combination of work and private life (you run through life full throttle)
12. Lack of control (you feel as if you have very little influence over things)
13. Hostile criticism (you did it wrong!)
14. (no longer) enjoying your work (you are in the wrong place)

You never know
how strong you
are until being
strong is the only
choice you have.

Bob Marley

Tiring Interaction

Sometimes, it can be very tiring to be around others, because you're constantly trying to make an impression and to convince people that you are likeable. Only then do you feel worthwhile. This way, you subconsciously waste a lot of energy. Lack of self-confidence, and being dependent on other people's judgment, are bad for business, bad for the I FEEL GOOD Company.

Need to Prove Yourself

Why did your self-confidence start to falter in the first place? A critical parent or teacher, a speech or presentation that didn't work out, blushing in front of the class, a rejection... When you start coloring these events with negative thoughts, then you can seriously undermine your self-confidence. 'Nobody thinks I'm good enough', 'Nobody thinks it's interesting what I have to say', 'I don't matter', or 'Nobody sees me'. This way you create a negative self-image. This becomes the lens through which you look at other situations as well. You become increasingly afraid of failure, because every presentation is linked to your self-esteem. It has to go well. The pressure you thereby put on what you're about to do is huge and the risk of damage to your self-esteem is high. This leads to stress and the typical reactions to stress: flight, fight, or freeze. Option 1: you don't do anything anymore and retreat (if you don't do anything and no one sees you, then you can't make any mistakes or be judged negatively). Option 2: you do your absolute utmost and pull out all the stops. Option 3: you freeze and become too paralyzed to touch anything. Recent insights have taught us that there is a fourth option, that occurs especially

among women: 'tend and befriend'. You want to belong, you want everyone to like you. And that is exhausting.

What You Say About Yourself

Who disapproves of you the most frequently and the most severely? Answer: you do. If something doesn't work out or doesn't go as you had intended, then you often judge yourself negatively. This way, you regularly sabotage yourself and undermine your self-confidence – a lot more than other people can. Because, to you, everything you tell yourself is the truth. Your brain is the most powerful instrument you have. If you tell yourself that you are ugly, fat, short, or a loser, then you will start to feel that way. And even worse, you will start to behave that way, causing your environment to look at, and treat, you differently. It then starts to seem as if the people around you are constantly confirming your negative self-image. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and a habit. But who is responsible for this? And who can change it? You can. You know yourself the best, so if you think you're a fool, then you don't expect others to contradict you and say you're fantastic. *It is your job to think you are wonderful and not anyone else's.* Someone who is near to you can always help you take your first steps in that direction.

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Carolien: *'When the kids were little, and we were living in an old, poorly heated farm, while I was dealing with the pressures of a busy job, I became overtaxed and a bit depressed. To me, I was a 'lousy mother-wife-employee-woman'. My*

7.

Out-of-Control Perfectionism (Very Demanding)

Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value.

Albert Einstein

Suzan: 'I have barely opened my eyes, when a look on my alarm clock tells me that disaster is awaiting. I will be late to work, on the day that I am to give the presentation of my life to the new director. I shoot out of bed in an attempt to control the damage as much as I can. With an alarmingly wild hairdo, a heartrate of 150, a skirt that is completely askew, an unwashed child, and a head full of worries and disaster scenarios, I step into the car. After a few obstacles in the shape of seat belts, an angry schoolteacher, far too many red lights, irritating drivers, middle fingers, cursing, a barely missed road post (that hadn't been there the day before, I'm sure) and an over-extended arm after trying to pull the ticket from the dispenser for the parking garage, I arrive at work – five minutes late, and completely stressed out. And the first thing I hear are the always-consoling words: 'Where were you?' Idiot. Well, to be honest, 'idiot' is something I myself add at the end of the sentence. Because I feel like a total loser for having failed to arrive on time. That I am only five minutes late due to the fact that I have done the impossible, is something I do not take into account.'

We have somehow convinced ourselves that we are not allowed to make any mistakes and that everything has to go without a hitch. This causes us to make extremely high, often unrealistic, demands of ourselves. And the STRESS Department is like a pressure cooker that is constantly trying to meet these demands as best it can.

Healthy and Unhealthy Perfectionism

Wanting to do everything right is a beautiful quality. Setting the bar high is not always a bad thing, as long as you can let go of your high expectations if the situation demands it, and as long as you don't overexert yourself or neglect yourself. Perfectionism only becomes a problem when you always strive for perfection. Because then you start to overdo it. Then you are never satisfied, and things are never good enough. IT HAS TO GO WELL is the compulsive thought that often accompanies this approach. You al-