

Here's a Technique to Help You Manage Stress Without Medication:

Laurence J. Stybel, Ed.D. and Maryanne Peabody

Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

The mother of one of the writers of this article learned that his mother dying of cancer. He had to be a source of emotional support to both her and to his father during a stressful time for him.

How was he going to deal with HIS stress?

The author started writing a daily diary about his thoughts and feelings.

The physical act of writing thoughts and overwhelming feelings became a source of strength.

It turns out the author is in good company.

Mick Jagger, President Ronald Regan and President John Quincy Adams are or were diary people.

Diaries are not just for adolescent girls!

Research on Diary Writing and Stress.

A high technology company downsized, and sixty-three of its fired long service professionals volunteered for an experiment about diary writing.

Job seekers were randomly assigned to one of three groups.

Subjects in the experimental group were required to write for five consecutive days, twenty minutes each day.

They were instructed to write about their deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding the layoff and how their lives had been affected. They wrote daily notes about their job search experiences, including their feelings about what happened during the day.

A second writing group was instructed to write about their job search experiences each day but to restrict the material to facts. Avoid writing about feelings. This was to be like an Excel Spread Sheet of job search activities.

The third group did not keep a daily diary.

Writers Get Results

Three months later, there was no significant difference between the non-writers and the facts-only writers in finding employment. The experimental group, however, was more successful in finding full time employment:

Sixty eight percent of the experimental group found jobs versus 48% of those that wrote diaries without emotional content and 27% of the group which did not keep a diary.

Those that kept diaries with emotions also consumed less alcohol than either of the other two groups.

Clearly the act of writing a diary is a stress management tool.

Why Will Diaries Work for You?

Diaries made the difference.

There was no significant difference between the three groups in terms of phone calls made, networking meetings, or letters sent out.

The diary allowed for the expression of negative thoughts and feelings surrounding job loss and job search.

The inhibition of these negative thoughts and feelings consumes energy that adds stress to an already stressful situation.

Don't Like Words?

One of our job candidates has artistic skills. Each day she drew her emotions and would show it to us.

The first few weeks were filled with images showing her torturing her last boss combined with images of herself as a homeless woman searching trash cans for food.

As time went on, the images became more positive.

Her final image was of herself crossing a finish line on a powerful white horse. Her arms were raised in victory and she was smiling.

If you are like us, you do not have artistic skills!

Go to images.google.com and select an image that reflects your feelings of the day. Add it to the diary file on your computer.

What Goes into a Diary?

An image-based diary might focus on your feelings for the day based on the photograph or painting you selected.

A word-based diary If your diary might contain the following issues:

Whom did I call on the phone. Did I get through?
What did I say? How did the other person respond?
How did I feel at the end of the call?
Whom did I see today? What did I say? How did I feel?
What are my plans for the next day?

What are my hopes?
What are my fears?

Your Diary is Confidential.

It is common for teenage girls to keep confidential diaries. Perhaps they are on to something we adults should copy.

Diary writing is a structure that forces you to put your feelings “out there” on paper yet confidential to the rest of the world.

Writing it in a confidential diary consumes less energy than bottling your emotions.

References

Stephanie P. Spera, Eric D. Buhrfeind, and James W. Pennebaker.
"Expressive writing and coping with job loss." *Academy of Management Journal*, 1994, 37,3, pp.722-733.

**

Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel are co-founders of Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

Its mission is to help companies provide leadership and career success to valued senior-level talent: retained search, coaching, and executive outplacement.

Companies seeking a free 30-minute consult can contact:

Maryanne Peabody
peabody@stybelpeabody.com
stybelpeabody.com
boardoptions.com