

The Peaceful Productivity Podcast

Ep #75: Stress Relief



Full Episode Transcript

[The Peaceful Productivity Podcast®](#), with your host *Kim Christiansen*

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Hi, everyone, welcome to the podcast. Today we're talking about stress relief.

I was thinking about this the other day, I was feeling quite stressed out. And I was using one of the techniques that I'm going to share with you later in the podcast, I thought this would make a good topic to share with my podcast audience, because I think there's lots of great information out there about how to alleviate stress over the long term and even prevent it.

But what I've noticed is there's, at least in my awareness, a little bit less information on how to relieve stress in the moment, how to relieve it *situationally*.

So that's the idea for the podcast today is to offer you some suggestions and techniques on how you can relieve stress in the moment.

The idea that I think about when I think about situational stress and relieving situational stress is the idea of the stress response cycle. I got this idea from Emily Nagoski.

If you're interested in reading more about Emily's philosophy, she has a book, it's called "Burnout, the Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle". It's a really good read.

She also has a TED talk with her sister, Amelia and they talk about this subject, and how to complete the stress cycle and how to relieve it in the moment.

The way that I understand it, at the beginning of this stress response cycle, there is a stressor. So whether it is an external circumstance, like an email from your boss, or a crying child, or even an internal stressor, like a thought about that circumstance - either of those types of things can be a stressor that triggers the stress response.

I've found that for myself, the intensity of the response to the stressor can vary, it really just depends on the nature of the stressor, my own particular history with that type of stressor, as well as my state of mind in the moment.

Sometimes things just roll off my back.

And then other times the same exact thing can trigger a very intense emotion like anger or frustration or overwhelm, depending on what my current mindset is. So in those situations, where I find that I'm feeling really, really stressed, I've found the best way to move through the stress response is to complete the stress cycle.

In fact, I picture it as a bit of a loop. If the starting point is feeling relatively calm, then the activation of the stress cycle, or the stress response, is only going halfway around the loop. If we don't deliberately take steps to close the loop, sometimes I find myself getting stuck in the stress response.

So, the question becomes what are some of those steps that we can use to close the loop to complete the stress cycle? I'm going to share with you some of my favorites.

When you are in a safe and secure space, the following can be really helpful to close the stress loop.

Those things include physical activity, creativity, laughing or positive social interaction, crying, physical affection with someone safe, and deep breathing. So I'll unpack those a little bit more one by one. But the theme that weaves itself through all of this is first finding a safe and secure space for yourself. I think that's the foundation by which we can create a closure to that stress loop.

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So the first one was physical activity. And of course this could include anything from jogging, sports, dancing, swimming, yoga, lifting weights. It can be an experiment with any type of activity that you enjoy. Some people recognize intuitively that when they're feeling stressed out, they need to go for a run or for a walk, and that they will experience that shift through that physical activity. My friend's daughter is that way, as soon as she's feeling stressed, she goes for a run.

Emily Nagoski, the author that I mentioned earlier, she even suggests something as simple as going for a walk around your car. When you arrive at work. If you find your commute to be somewhat stressful, that level of physical activity can be enough just to complete the stress cycle.

For myself, what I've recently been experimenting with is weightlifting. What I've noticed is that the contraction and the release of the muscles has some effect on my ability to release the stress - it's really quite fascinating.

So you can experiment with something that feels good for you.

The next one is creativity. I recently got a book out of the library, it was called "Draw Yourself Calm". I have always loved to doodle and draw caricatures. I can't say that word. I've always loved to do that kind of thing. But this book is more about just drawing in a way that feels good to you, without any sort of method or any sort of end goal in mind. And I'm finding it to be very relaxing, really loving that. So drawing is something that helps me to complete that stress cycle.

Also, organizing can be very helpful. Organizing a closet, or even playing a game like Sudoku, I find to be very helpful. So again, the thing with creativity is just to find an activity that you enjoy that you find relaxing.

The next one is laughing or positive social interaction. This one's fairly self explanatory, but there's been findings that even a casual, but friendly social interaction is a great way to demonstrate to ourselves - it's an external sign that the world is a safe place. Even something as small as a greeting or a compliment with a cashier in your favorite coffee place can bring about the relief of the stress response.

The next one is crying. Suppressing tears may be stopping yourself from a natural part of your stress cycle recovery. If you've ever felt really relieved after crying it out, you've likely completed the stress cycle. For me, sometimes watching something sad can help me express myself through tears.

The next one is physical affection with someone safe. Experts say that a twenty second long hug with a loved one can activate the release of the hormone oxytocin, which has been found to lower blood pressure, lower your heart rate and improve your mood.

Another option is to also cuddle with a pet I can also release oxytocin. Other things that you can try in terms of physical affection are self massage and embracing yourself in a hug.

One of my favorites is leaning my head back while I'm seated in a chair and supporting the weight of my head with my hands. It's almost like cradling my head it feels really good.

So the last thing is deep breathing.

There's a lot of information out there around deep breathing. It's so helpful to remember because I often notice that when I am feeling stressed that my breathing becomes more shallow. It's almost like a mild form of the fight or flight response.

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So what can be helpful is just simply shifting my focus to my breathing for a short period of time and noticing that shallow breathing.

An exercise that you can try if you want more deep breathing is something called Square Breathing. Square breathing or box breathing is simply the duration of time of each of the four stages around the deep breathing exercise.

So four seconds each for the inhalation, the hold, the exhalation, and the hold. That's called the square breathing exercise.

My favorite deep breathing exercise is known simply as the 4-7-8 technique. It's inhaling for four, holding for seven, and exhaling for eight.

Whichever technique that you choose, the intent is just to slow down and focus on your breathing. Exercises like Tai Chi, or yoga are really good at completing the stress cycle because they combine both movement and breathing.

So you'll know that you've completed the stress cycle, when you feel intuitively, there's a shift in mood, or maybe a shift in mental or physical tension. You may also notice that you start breathing more deeply, and you feel your thoughts start to relax. It can be really helpful to call your own attention to the completion of the stress cycle. This helps train your brain to remember that you have the power to bring about situational stress relief for yourself.

Something that I find helpful is rating my stress levels before and after I take the steps to close the stress loop. Yesterday when I did this exercise, I noticed that before taking any steps, I was at about an eight on my stress level. And then afterwards, I was able to bring it down to a two in terms of my own subjective rating of my stress levels. If these techniques are relatively new to you, it may take some time to really tune into your stress levels. So it's important to give yourself some grace as you experiment with the different techniques.

If you notice stress is interfering with your daily life, if it becomes severe or doesn't go away, please consider talking with a professional mental health expert who can help you identify other strategies.

I really want to thank you for joining me today and I'm wishing you all a very peaceful and productive week.

Take care everyone.

Are you looking for a coach who will help you increase your business profit while protecting your time and your well being? If so, I'll invite you to check out my website, FinancialWellnessCoach.ca.