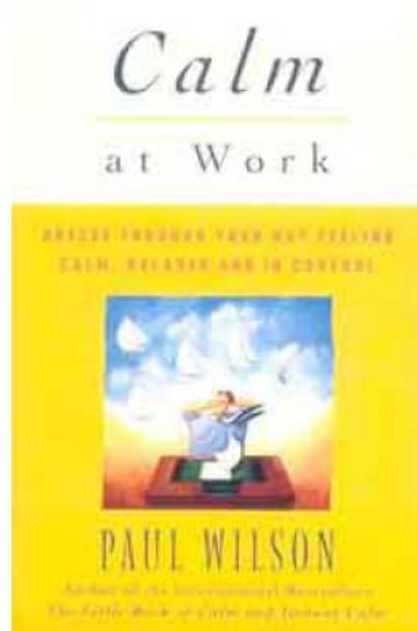


Calm at Work
Breeze through Your Day Feeling Calm,
Relaxed and In Control



Overview

Work can often be one of the most stressful situations in our lives. We have to work with people that we don't necessarily have anything in common with and perform boring and repetitive tasks. In the United States and other parts of the world, you are supposed to look busy at all times. This can add to the stress since you feel like you are being watched constantly. *Calm at Work* offers over 100 practical exercises and techniques to help you remain calm at work. Here are the main ideas offered in both *Calm at Work*, along with Wilson's condensed *Little Book of Calm at Work*.

Key ideas

Act calm - When you pretend you are calm, and adopt the characteristics of a calm person, you'll convince yourself you're calm in no time.

Go bonsai - Sometimes, even the smallest glimpse of nature is all you need to escape the pressures of life. Add plants to your office and try to take your breaks in nature as often as possible.

Carry a notebook - Write down your worries and watch them diminish. Have a half-hour worry session where you deal with all of the concerns in a concentrated and focused way.

Worry when the time comes - Worry always relates to the future. So if you devote your full attention to what is going on now, not only will you feel calmer, but also the future will take care of itself.

Separate major from minor - You can add harmony to your day simply by dividing your day into 'big picture' times and 'small picture' (detail) times. The less they overlap, the calmer you will remain.

Space your engagements - Allow a fifteen-minute buffer zone between each appointment. Call ahead to make sure that the other person is running on time.

Do the 'Type A' sidestep - If you have too many Type A (driven, competitive, tense) personality traits, avoid other Type A's as much as you practicality can.

Do it over and over again - You can make a calming and meditative exercise out of any repetitive task or action (such as filing papers), if you concentrate on it, to the exclusion of all else, for an extended period of time.

Be clear with ambition - When ambition is coupled with unclear goals, you have a stressful combination. Make it your ambition to stay calm with clear goals and objectives.

Back up religiously - To always feel calm about using your computer, make a routine of backing up your work. To be really safe, store a backup copy away from the computer in case of fire or theft.

Turn down success - It is not essential that you succeed in everything you do. Some people stay calm by walking away from 'success'.

Nap if possible - when you take a brief naps throughout the day, you'll be surprised at how much peace you can derive from just a couple of minutes - even while sitting at your desk.

Soothing scents - certain scents stimulate the production of the relaxing

chemical, serotonin, in the brain. Among the more effective of these scents are lavender and chamomile.

Look for a sign - You can easily overcome rising tension as long as you are aware of its approach. Look for the signs - such as when your speech speeds up, or your breathing becomes shallow - as a signal that it's time to concentrate on becoming calm.

Call it a day - At the end of every workday, give yourself permission to have the rest of the day off.

Decline politely - Knowing when to decline additional work or social activities is often the difference between performing well and being over-extended.

Seek the upside - It is not always easy to see the positive and optimistic side of the events in your life. But if you take the trouble to search, your creativity will reveal them over and over again.

Dine lightly - Light foods, raw foods and easily digested foods are those that have become known as 'calm foods'.

Steal a calm hideaway - Find yourself a special place such as a chair or a favorite outdoor place that you can associate with feelings of being calm and relaxed. Go there, and sit quietly whenever the need arises.

Fresh air is one of the most powerful counterbalances to stress and anxiety. Either opening a window, using an air cleaner or providing fresh oxygen with plants can help.

Look ahead a year ago - If you want to put today's problems and worries into perspective, imagine how important they will seem if you look back in a year's time.

Ask and you shall receive - It's remarkable how much you can achieve in the workplace by simply asking for what you want rather than waiting for it to be offered.

Avoid waiting lines - Phone, fax, or write ahead to avoid queuing. And if you can't avoid it, allow twice as much time as you think you need to get to the head.

Deal with that problem - Action overcomes the stressful nature of procrastination. Deal with each problem as it arises, and you will have cleared the way to peace of mind.

Vary the pattern - When you find yourself under pressure, do something different. Work in a way you wouldn't normally work, think a way you wouldn't normally think, sit in someone else's chair.

Go easy on yourself - Many people find the greatest pressures in the workplace are self-imposed. Be reasonable with the ambitions, schedules, and deadlines you create for yourself, and you'll leave yourself room to become calm.

The human cycle of rest and efficiency requires a few minutes of right brain activity (creativity, imagination, visualization, daydreaming) every ninety minutes. Make this switch regularly and you'll know how to remain calm.

Laugh at the boss - Once you have seen the chairman as Donald Duck, he will never seem so threatening again.

Make a choice - Look for the choices in all aspects of your work, and try to be aware of them constantly. Then you'll always feel you have some measure of control over what happens.

Divide and conquer - The stress of procrastination is easily removed by dividing all big tasks into a series of smaller ones, then taking on the least pleasant ones first.

If you strive to improve only the things you have the power to improve, you won't lose sleep over the impossible.

Imagine how relaxed you'd feel if you could add that easygoing, holiday feeling to every day of the week. All it takes is one little trigger - a photo, a memento, a Hawaiian shirt in your briefcase - and you're away!

Priorities - deciding what is the most important in your life will help you remain calm under pressure. Imagine you are 65 years old and looking back over your life so far. Success at work might be less important than things like your relationship with spouse and kids.

Breathing effectively - Nervous people breathe in short shallow breaths reducing oxygen to the brain. Breathing in slow, deep measured breaths brings on calm. In order to breathe deeply you need to breathe from the bottom of your lungs so that you move your abdomen in and out. Your shoulders should be still not moving up and down.

Calm from many directions - By employing a number of little ways to calm throughout the day - rather than depending on one big calm hit - you'll find the path is made much smoother.

Use the subconscious to help relieve stress

1. Visualization - imagine a big movie screen with yourself calm at work or in another relaxing situation.

2. Affirmation - tell yourself positive things such as, 'I feel complete confidence in my job'. Repeat several times a day.

3. Assumption - imagine all of the characteristics of a calm person. How would they speak, move, act, etc? Now assume or pretend that person is you. Act out all those calm gestures. This technique is also known as modeling.

Causes of Stress and Possible Solutions

1. Time pressure

Deadlines and workload are often major causes of stress. Our perception of time and how we handle it often makes a difference between stress and calm. One suggestion is to get rid of your wristwatch, even for a day. Every time you look at it gives you more stress.

Depressurizing deadlines - Often people get stressed with deadlines, not because they're running out of time, but because there is something threatening and final about it. Thinking of having a certain 'time allocation' to complete the task, rather than having a 'deadline' often helps, as does employing the powers of your subconscious mind.

Procrastination - The longer you put off doing something the more stressful it becomes (and damaging to your self-esteem). Divide larger jobs into small tasks. Write them down and allocate some time for each. Then start with the task you like the least. Don't forget to reward yourself for accomplishments.

Overwork. We are often overworked due to our inability to say no to others requests. Before you take on anything new, make sure you have set clear goals and priorities. Plan your day and set priorities for your tasks. It is easier to say no if you have a work plan and can rationalize your refusal. Remember, 20% of the work will produce 80% of the results. Concentrate on that 20%.

2. Loss of control

People who feel in control of their life and have some independence in their work will have less stress. They're also often more focused in what they're doing. Even boring or repetitive jobs can be made enjoyable by becoming totally immersed in what you're doing. You do this by applying 100% effort. Whatever the task, concentrate on doing the best job you possibly can. You'll soon feel calm.

Assume Control. If you assume you have control over your work you'll probably end up getting some. Others will recognize you have the ability to do it and either grant you the authority or simply leave you alone. If you see yourself as totally dominated by the boss, you will probably always be that way.

3. Your internal state

Possibly the largest cause of stress is what's going on inside a person. Fear, anxiety, insecurity are all examples of problems we create for ourselves. **Plan to be calm.** Most people and organizations are not good at forward planning. They usually start with the present and think about where they'll be in five years. Perhaps a more effective method would be to create a mental road map of where you want to be at various stages along the path.

Put aside 20 minutes a day for planning and organization and you'll save a lot more time than you've put into the planning and be less stressed because of it. People who are highly driven often have a lot of stress due to the pressure they put on themselves. When their goals are vague, unclear or unrealistic they will increase stress, while clear, succinct and achievable goals will serve to energize and motivate.

Driven people also increase pressure through their own perception of events and the pressure that they put on themselves. Although some of this is useful, it is

important to know when to ease up on a less vital task. Most people can work an average of 90 to 120 minutes before their performance starts to deteriorate. A short break will help you work more effectively.

4. Social pressures

Difficult relationships in the workplace are often a major form of stress. One way of handling difficult or frustrating people is to know exactly what you want to get out of the situation. Being assertive is another good way to relieve stress. Assertive people are often more relaxed and easygoing than aggressive or submissive types. In order to be assertive you must first know what you want and what is reasonable to ask for. Then you need to express that in simple, positive words.

Change can be very disruptive. Since change is inevitable you need to embrace it and make it work for you. If you become stressed through change think about all of the benefits change has brought in your life, such as simple corrections with word processing instead of re-typing a letter several times.

Dealing with Criticism. There are two techniques for dealing with criticism.

1. If there is a partial truth in the criticism acknowledge the truth but limit the scope of the criticism. For example 'Yes, it was sloppy yesterday, ...but will be much better today.'

2. Ask for more feedback. 'What should I do to improve it.?'

Other factors

Fluorescent lighting can cause strain on eyes impair your equilibrium. Use other options, including full-spectrum lighting where possible. Noise can also cause a lot of stress. Exercise is well-known for its stress relieving qualities. Find an exercise routine that you enjoy and stick with it.

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