

stress

for less

Learning how to switch off and de-stress will let you get more done.

Today has been a pretty typical Wednesday for me – it's the day I set aside for meetings and working on current projects. It started with a 7am speaking engagement at Parnell Rotary Club, followed by a quick trip back to my office to do some work, field emails and make phone calls. By 4 o'clock I was feeling tired, my brain was foggy and my vast to-do list lay before me on my desk – including writing this article! I realised I'd been going for nine hours without more than a 20-minute break for lunch.

It can be tempting to plough on, can't it, to get a few more of those things out of the way? To lift the weight off. It got me thinking ...

I believe our tendency to treat our bodies like machines is a primary cause of stress and low energy levels. The reality is that the human body is an extraordinarily sophisticated system, but one that needs to be fuelled, hydrated and rested to perform well.

Top athletes take great care to look after their adrenals and nervous system because they need their body (and mind) to perform at its absolute best. For some reason, the business world often neglects to take the same kind of care yet business people still expect their mind and body to perform optimally; often well beyond normal working hours.

Stress often shows up in the inability to switch off from work in the evenings and weekend. I am frequently surprised at the number of employers who ask me why it is so important for people to not take work home with them. Leaving work at work allows our mind and nervous system to rest and revitalise; ready to go again the following day or week. Feeling distracted at home (the 'not quite there' factor), having trouble sleeping, or feeling tired and uninspired in the morning can be signs you're not sufficiently switching off.

One of my coaching clients recently commented that, since he has been using new strategies for switching off from work, he estimates his productivity at work has increased by 20 percent. He's feeling more focused, his work satisfaction has increased and his engagement levels are better. He is also enjoying his evenings with his wife more. Although the increase in productivity is purely his personal estimation, it's an indicator of the value to organisations in helping staff attend to their stress patterns and their ability to wind down.

The value in helping staff avoid ongoing and cumulative stress is a no-brainer. The nervous system, heart and adrenals suffer exponentially when stress patterns build over time – significantly prolonging recovery time. Ask anyone who has experienced burn-out; it can take months or years to recover. I believe the cost of stress to organisations is severely underestimated. And it is entirely preventable.

As I write the last few lines here, my day is finishing on a lovely note. I feel clear headed and focused because, at that 4 o'clock moment, I downed tools and took myself out for a walk in the sunshine. With my mind free of other clutter I virtually wrote this article in my head as I walked – with so much more creativity than I would have had sitting in front of my computer.

The moment that makes all the difference is the one where you notice that a pause is required. A pause that takes the form of a walk outside, a cup of tea, giving your body a good shake out, a lunchtime run or whatever it takes to refresh your mind and body. Pause. Breathe. Look out for those moments.

Karen Ross

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Stress-less tips

At the end of each day, take stock of what you have achieved

This serves two key purposes: to recognise the effort and progress you're making, and help you feel satisfied with what you have achieved so that you can go in to your evening or weekend feeling you can enjoy your downtime.

Download your to-dos
For tomorrow out of your head and onto paper then exit the building

There's no need to feel guilty
About enjoying a lazy evening or weekend.

Get out in to the open every day

Or at least a few times a week. Even if it's a city park, do it, and notice the nature around you and connect with it. Don't go and sit under a tree and spend the whole time thinking about that work problem or an argument with your spouse. See the sun on the leaves, smell the green, listen to the wind and soak it up!

Awareness is key

Be mindful of your triggers for stress. Get to know them and get used to interrupting the response. If it's traffic jams, put some feel good music on, plan a delicious meal in your mind or reminisce about your last holiday (or plan the next one!). Sometimes distraction is as good an approach as any to avoid getting frustrated!

Leave work at work

(with the occasional exception as appropriate). Create a ritual for switching out of work and into home or play mode.

Change your state

Put on some feel-good music, go for a walk/run/swim, have a 'happy picture' in your purse or car that puts you in a good mood, or use the Mood Mover (see the free download on my website).

Get to bed by 10 or 11pm

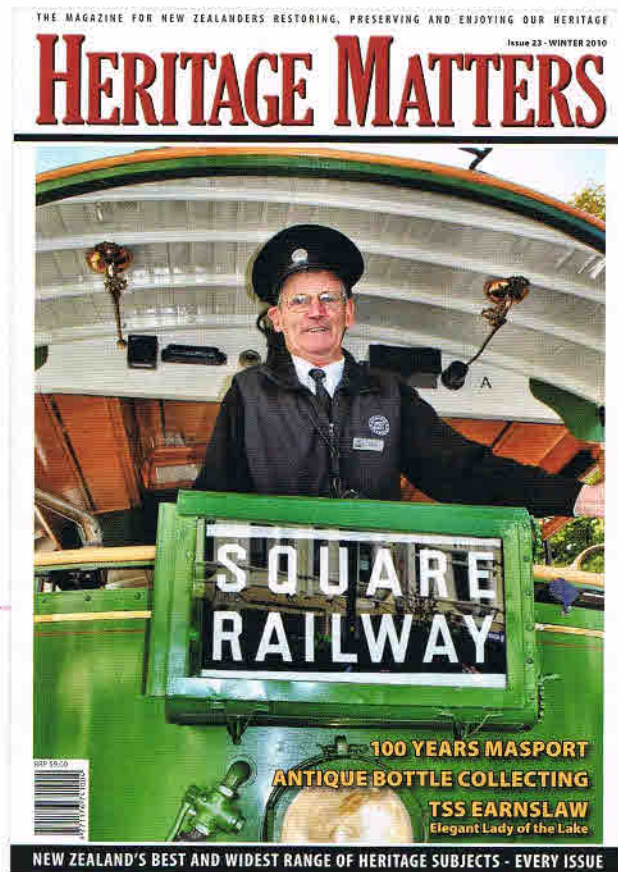
If you need to work after hours, go to bed early and get up early to work. Your parasympathetic nervous system is working through the evening to rejuvenate and replenish your mind and body. It clicks off (and into sympathetic mode) around 3am. The more sleep you get before 3am, the more rested you will be.

Notice what works and feels better

For instance, notice when you're calmer in certain situations, more energised or focused. This acts as a powerful feedback loop at the unconscious level in your mind. It's a bit like saying to your mind "That's great, thanks, more of that please". This will help new habits form more quickly.

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