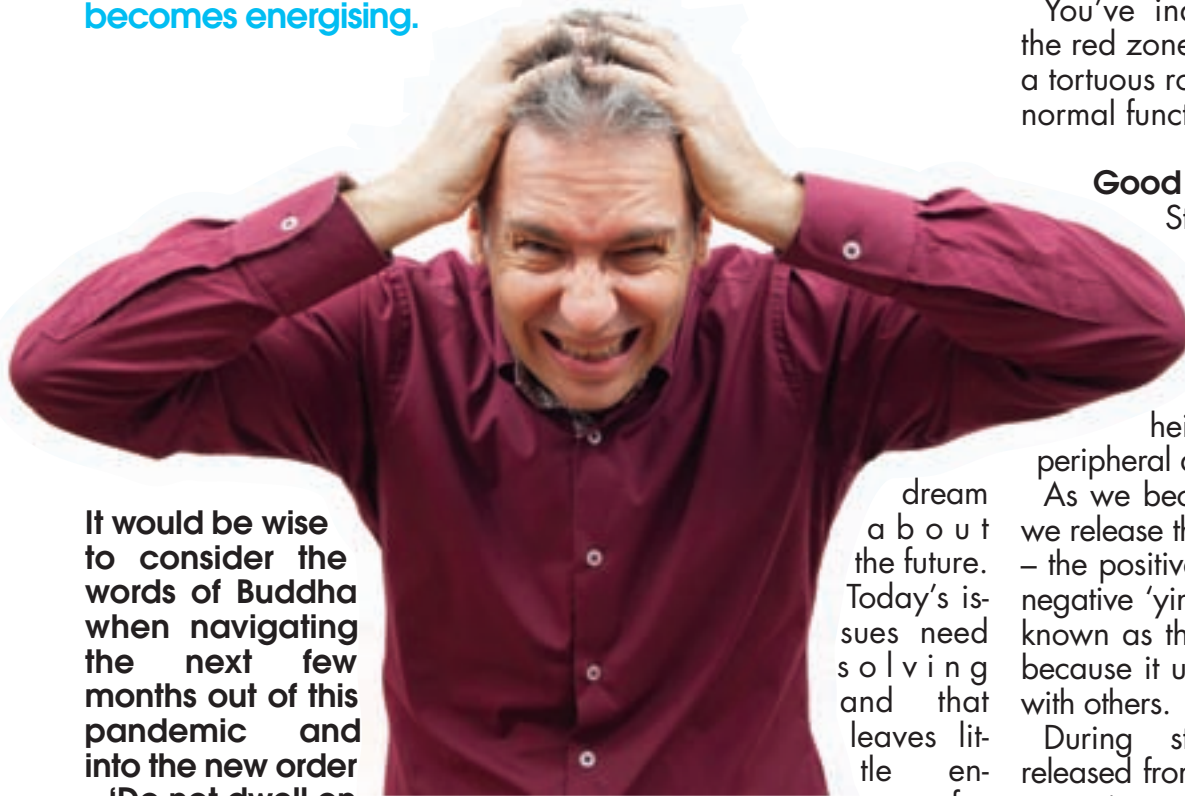


Embrace The Stress – The Going Is Not Getting Any Easier Soon

Additional post-pandemic stress is here to stay for a while writes Kate Ashley-Norman. However, if you expect stress to be...well stressful, it will be. On the other hand, you can use it as a motivator – and then it becomes energising.



It would be wise to consider the words of Buddha when navigating the next few months out of this pandemic and into the new order – ‘Do not dwell on the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment’.

I believe that the monumental struggles that this industry has traversed these last few months – exacerbated by supply issues, skills shortages and prices squeezes – has literally forced many to be full focussed on the here and now. And that here and now consists of long, stressful days and short sleepless nights.

With everyday being a challenge, we have less time to dwell on the past, nor indeed to

dream about the future. Today’s issues need solving and that leaves little energy for anything else.

So let me ask you – how many of you are feeling your stress levels are higher than normal at the moment?

Chances are you don’t even realise they are – you’ve been working at that higher pace for so long now that it has become the norm. Even if you have managed to get away on holiday, the added burdens of multiple testing and unpredictability of the zoning regulations have kept us all vigilant to the whims of our government.

You’ve inadvertently entered the red zone and are looking at a tortuous route out of it back to normal functioning!

Good stress

Stress in its purest form is actually good for us – it gets us going, spurs us into action, gives us focus and a heightened sense of peripheral awareness.

As we become more stressed, we release the hormone oxytocin – the positive ‘yang’ to cortisol’s negative ‘ying’. Oxytocin is also known as the ‘cuddle’ hormone because it urges you to connect with others.

During stress, oxytocin is released from the pituitary gland to motivate social connection. It encourages you to reach out to other people, seek support, help and protect others.

Oxytocin is also brilliant for heart health, which defies the common narrative that stress causes heart attacks.

Your heart has special receptors, absorbing the oxytocin, a natural anti-inflammatory, which in turn helps regenerate and repair any damage sustained during the period of stress. This inbuilt mechanism for resilience ensures that any stress response automatically rebalances the damage as a natural course of stress.



Bad stress

The danger kicks in when heightened stress is not allowed to dissipate and cortisol continues to pump out at an increasingly damaging rate, which means the oxytocin is not allowed to do its job. And the wear and tear on our bodies (and minds) gathers apace.

So if you are experiencing broken sleep, a gripey stomach, blurry vision, woolly headedness, IBS, mood swings, then be conscious that you are probably well into the red when it comes to your stress levels.

Here to stay for a while

However, the causes of that stress are not going to go away. You have a job to do. Tens of not hundreds of people are reliant on you – employees, employers, customers, suppliers – their needs and demands will continue to come at you from all angles.

And as we enter a new phase of these highly peculiar pandemic months, the unpredictability of our future will only continue.

Unpredictability can lead to a sense of powerlessness. Powerlessness can lead to a sense of

despair and depression.

If you cannot (and indeed don't want) to change the circumstances that are causing you stress (and yes, some of us do enjoy the challenge of running a business) then there is one single shift you can make that can have life changing consequences – that is to change your mindset around stress. See it not as something harmful to you but as something that can be beneficial and used to your advantage.


Stress – it's in the mind?

30,000 people were asked in a 1998 study if they had experienced high levels of stress. They also asked if they believed that stress was harmful to their health.

Eight years later they tracked those of the 30,000 who had died.

Results showed that those who had reported high levels of stress were 43% more likely to die. But that increased risk only applied to those who had stated that they believed that stress was harmful to their health. Those who did not view stress as harmful to their health had the lowest risk of death of anyone on the study.

What these findings indicate, is that stress itself is not the biggest killer, it is the stress combined with the belief that the thought it is harmful increase risk of death.

How powerful our minds can be – and isn't it thus true, when handed lemons, it is by far the best to make lemonade? 

[Kate Ashley-Norman partners with conscientious fenestration companies to strengthen employee well-being. She runs bespoke stress 'recalibration' training workshops – Tel: 07904 345354](#)

