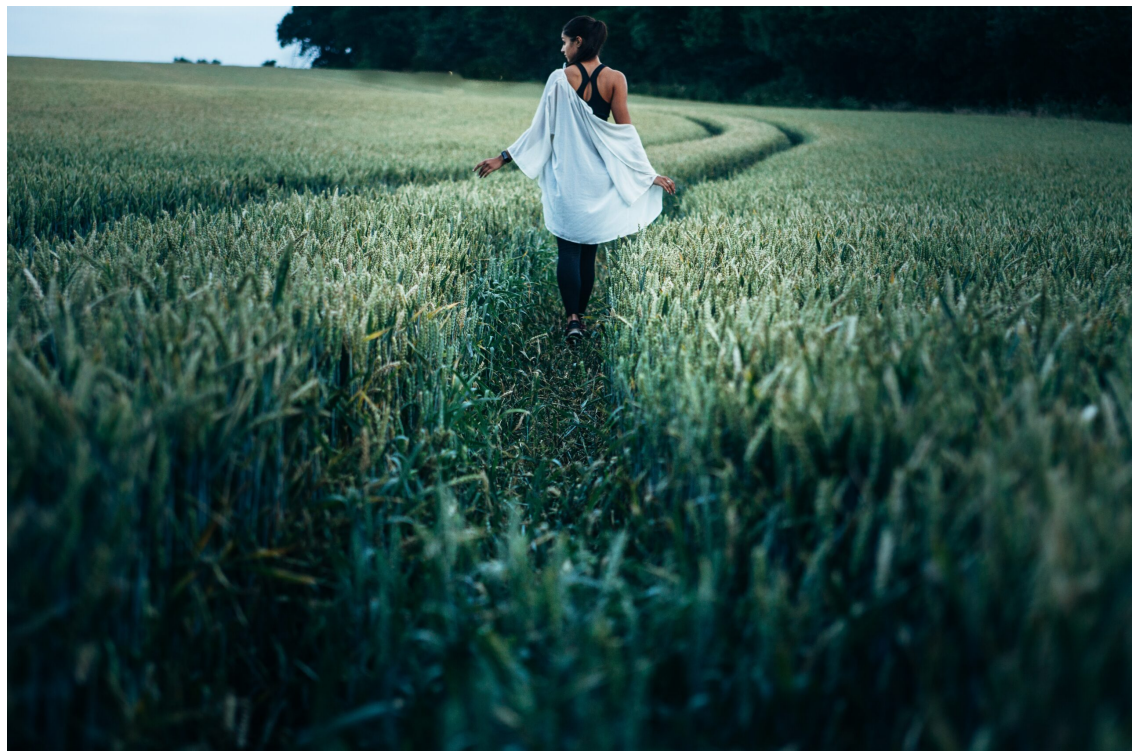


The grass is greener where you water it: with Charles Taymour

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We currently live in a society where we're told that we must always try to be zen, to eradicate stress from our lives and live at peace *all the time*.

This mindset is probably making us more stressed. Trying to live a completely stress-free life is going to make those inevitably more stressful times harder to manage. The better option is to feel comfortable sitting with stress, having a bank of coping mechanisms that make stress easier to overcome and understanding when stress is actually a help, not a hinderance.

Good versus bad stress

When we think of stress, we usually think negative thoughts. And sometimes, stress can be damaging to both brain and body. When we become stressed, especially chronically, our cortisol levels increase. This stress hormone, if left untreated, can wreak havoc. It makes us anxious; it increases our blood pressure and can halt our digestive system. What causes stress differs from person to person, but usual culprits are money, relationships, and work.

But not all stress is bad stress. Good stress, which usually happens in short bursts, does wonderful things to our performance and mood. It motivates us, it inspires us, and it excites us. It releases endorphins; more commonly known as the 'feel-good' brain chemical. When you go on a rollercoaster or spend time planning a party, this is when you might feel this kind of stress.

However, data regularly shows us that this kind of stress is limited – especially at work.

In the workplace, [76% of employees](#) report moderate-to-high or high levels of stress. Since last year, this number has increased by nearly 10%. A staggering jump in only 12 months. But why are we seeing this epidemic of stressed workers, and what's the solution?

The origins of modern-day stress

We have never had so much at our convenience as we do today. If we're hungry, we can get food to our door. If we're tired, we can book a holiday with the click of a button. If we want to talk to our friends, we can connect with them in seconds. Yet, we are the most in debt, lonely, medicated society there has ever been.

I believe technology has a lot to answer for when it comes to the current state of the nation's wellbeing. We're social animals that rely on connection to keep us safe. But today, we're locked into our digital devices – we're digitally addicted. We're no longer connecting like we used to. We're not building meaningful relationships and there is so much interference in our daily lives in the forms of Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram, Spotify, Siri and so on, that we're forgetting the very basic needs that keep us safe, well and level.

I always say, **performance is potential minus interference**. But with so much *stuff* in the way and with such little human connection, no wonder our wellbeing and in turn, performance – be it at work or in our personal lives – is suffering.

Something needs recalibrating.

Managing stress

Stress is discomfort, but it's not always a bad thing to be uncomfortable. Take the gym as an example; it's hard work but it helps us to achieve our fitness goals. Studying for exams certainly isn't comfortable but by gaining qualifications, we can live a comfortable way of life in a job or vocation that we love or are passionate about.

So, it's not about eradicating stress or trying our best to be completely stress-free, it's about having resilience in those more stressful times to remain balanced.

Finding connection

First and foremost, connection is vital. It's not just about what can help you back up during difficult times, but who. In the workplace, it's about having a culture which promotes both self-awareness and acceptance. As an employer, it's vital to understand that asking employees to leave their stress at the office door is unrealistic and that by ignoring stress, it'll only be allowed to grow until it's unmanageable. Having an environment that promotes openness, honesty and support not only combats stress but also helps people feel supported and cared for – a crucial element of any good business.

Shrink the problem or outgrow it?

When stress occurs, we have two options. We can either shrink the stress or we can grow and find ways to carry it. Shrinking stress is a short-term fix; it's likely to grow again with the next stressful event and we're back to square one. But if we learn to grow from stress, building up resilience and learning tools to make us stronger, we'll be able to carry it with far more ease.

The tools learnt when it comes to stress management are unique to you however, the best options would be to seek out guidance and mentoring, talking therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), all of which can equip you with stress management skills.

A big part of stress management is perspective. It's about taking ownership of our thoughts and our actions to create a better, healthier response to stress. In all the years I've been supporting people, I've never known such ruthless internal dialogues. We're meaner and harder on ourselves than we've ever

been – it's time for this to change.

Good stress management is about controlling what you can and letting go of what you can't. The most resilient people I know are those that have purpose in their lives, both personally and professionally. They find people and work that fulfils them, that makes them feel good and does good for the wider community they live in. The bottom line: if what you do doesn't motivate you to get up in the morning, then it's time to re-evaluate where you are and make changes.

Perhaps it's about undertaking further training to enhance your career, maybe it's about becoming a Mental Health First Aider to support others, or it could be something as simple as finding the longer route to work for an additional twenty minutes of fresh air and exercise in the morning.

Stress can be debilitating if not managed properly. It can completely alter our physical and mental wellbeing, pushing us off kilter for long periods of time. But, because of stress' inevitable role in our lives, it's about knowing how to manage it rather than attempting to eradicate it.

This Stress Awareness Month, take time to understand what you need and, perhaps more importantly, who you need to help manage and overcome those stressful times in your life for a happier, healthier you.

Charles regularly delivers morning workshops for Jersey Business. Visit our [Events page](#) for more information.