

Westways

OCTOBER 1984

Peptalk

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WAKEFIELD

Stress management has become important to many businesses, and courses are frequently offered by universities. The University of California has recently appointed one of the state's leading exponents of stress management, Dr. Deane Shapiro, as director of the Executive Stress Management and Wellness Center in the department of psychiatry and human behavior at U.C. Irvine [(714) 856-1070].

Dr. Shapiro, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Stanford University, has been active in setting up seminars for executives and professionals for several years. His research includes studying Zen and other Eastern philosophies. His book, *Precision Nirvana*, has been called "an owner's manual for the care and maintenance of the mind."

Dr. Shapiro's views on stress combine Eastern philosophy with Western psychology. Describing the Eastern teachings as advocating balance, centeredness, tranquility and a calm perception of life, he says that Western ideas are more assertive. Western man wants to be in control, and this can result in problems which are difficult to control. One needs both the tranquility and assertiveness, and Dr. Shapiro tries

to bring the philosophies together for his clients.

A typical example of the desire to be in control is "a woman with a 'superwoman syndrome,'" says Shapiro. "She tries to combine family, career, an intimate relationship with spouse, and do each one absolutely perfectly. She is constantly feeling guilty because something is always in the air being juggled. There are two different things in the terms of stress management for that person. If you tell that person to relax, as your only strategy, it won't be very effective, because these people don't have time to relax."

What really needs to be done, Shapiro explains, is to look at what is compelling them to try to do so much. They may want to examine what in terms of self-esteem or value systems is motivating them. If they stop and take another look, they may find that they are trying to do too much to do anything well. "That person doesn't really want to be a 'witch,' but a really great human being. There are just too many demands, so she may end up feeling like one."

According to Shapiro, other people allow "issues to pile up until their circuits go on overload. These people need relaxation on a daily basis to sort and sift and be sure they are catching up with themselves each day.

"As the old adage says, you shouldn't go to bed angry at a loved one. So you shouldn't go to bed until you have dealt with whatever issues have come up during the day. That way you have a sense of peace within yourself. Use Eastern relaxation techniques at night to look through the day to be sure you have made peace with events.

"A person's day can be made easier by following the advice of cardiologist Glen Elliott, who laid out two rules. Number one—don't sweat the small stuff. Number two—it's all small stuff."

Dr. Shapiro has formulated stress management guidelines which he finds helpful for patients as well as students: "There are different types of control necessary to lead a

healthy life. One is active type, or assertiveness. It is important that you feel you are not a passive victim, that you are able to make decisions, changes and be effective.

"Notice what you can control, make decisions and act on them—even in the midst of uncertainties. Almost all decisions are made without enough information, but don't be afraid to fail. It may cause less anxiety to make a mistake than to have continued indecision.

"One must also recognize that you can't live a life of continuous active control. There may be times when we have to give ourselves permission to let go, to yield, even be playful. A spiritual understanding is helpful in the letting-go part.

"Ensure that you are taking time for yourself, making self a daily priority. Stress breaks—laughter, giggling—increase the power of the human spirit.

"Set goals but don't be caught by them; make priorities.

"Be gentle and respectful of the body, aware and sensitive to the body's cues.

"Take exercise breaks, as physical stress is just as damaging as mental stress. Muscles relax well after exercise.

"Listen to and remind yourself about your vision, your path of heart. What is your goal and game plan? What rules are you following, how often, and why?

"Notice the control/lack of control areas. Realize that not everything in your life is under your personal control. Notice if you consistently go after the impossible, demanding perfection and unrealistic expectation of yourself.

"Make stress an asset: After awareness, look at causes and antecedents. Recognizing your goal, use the energy and the physiological motivation in a clear-sighted, positive direction."

These precepts have worked out well for many people, but there are also other paths to successful stress management. We'd like to hear from readers who would like to share ways of coping that have been successful in their lives. ☺

WESTWAYS

MARCH 1984

Having fun is something many

people need to think about. On any given day, for instance, ask yourself how many times you have had some sense of stress, major or minor. On the same day, notice how many times you experience enjoyment, smiles or giggles.

According to Dr. Deane Shapiro, most people will probably find more stress than giggles. Why?

Westerners like to be in control. We are assertive, like to conquer. We search for a problem and fix it. "We fix it and then look immediately for something else to fix," says Shapiro.

He says having fun is very difficult for the Type A executive. He wants to control the world, and it's difficult for him to give himself permission to laugh, enjoy, relax. "Laughter is a way of letting go, to laugh at circumstances beyond our control, to relax.

"We know so much about biochemical changes when stress occurs, but not enough about what happens when we laugh or giggle," says Shapiro. "We know a lot about how disease occurs, but not enough about how health occurs."

Certainly, there is a lot of interest now in solving the mystery, and each one of us can do a few experiments on our own.

Research done by Dr. Paul Ekman, a psychologist at U.C. San Francisco, indicates that just producing the expression of joy can affect the nervous system. In one of his experiments, professional actors were asked to contort their faces to show joy, sorrow, fear, anger, surprise and disgust. They were told to raise eyebrows, put them together, raise upper eyelids and stretch lips horizontally. Results showed that there were changes in heart rate, respiration and skin temperature.

Moreover, one smile can lead to another, Ekman believes. Mimicry may produce similar effects on the nervous system.

We may not be sure what all this does to our respiration, but we know it is good for our sense of humor, which Cousins says we should keep in good working condition. "Try it," he says, "you'll never be the same."

