TOP 100 TIPS FOR STAFF MANAGEMENT

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> "A leader has the vision and conviction that a dream can be achieved. He inspires the power and energy to get it done."
>
> - Ralph Lauren

Being an Effective Team Leader

1. **Do it first.** If you can tell your team that you've been there, done that; you have more credibility and will gain more respect for what you want.

2. **Take the best of what you've done and improve it.** After you've established your credibility, sort through the best of your experience and improve it to suit your current situation.

3. **Be reasonable in your expectations.** Remember that it took you a long time to get to your current expertise level, so be reasonable about what you expect others to accomplish for you.

4. **Give direction and then back off.** Let people do what they need to do. If you have a team, let them do their jobs, don't micromanage every detail. Most people work best when they're given autonomy.

5. **Offer support on an as-needed basis.** Let those you manage know that you're there for support when the going gets tough, but don't do their jobs for them.

6. **Build in accountability.** With leadership comes accountability and responsibility. Make sure people know that you expect them to 'own up' to what they have to do.

7. **Be crystal clear about your goals.** It's amazing what people hear. Be definitive about where you want your team to go and the timeline for getting there. No one likes to flounder in a haze of unclear and ambiguous direction.

8. **Reward in public, reprimand in private.** You won't gain respect for reprimanding someone in front of others. Remember, the ultimate responsibility is yours and if your people know that you back them up, they'll go the extra mile for you.

9. **Credit the team.** If your department or team has been successful in meeting the goals, acknowledge them in open forums and public opportunities. Do this even when you know that one or two of the team members has not fully pulled their weight. You'll gain their respect and they'll be more willing to follow you the next time.

10. **Be sensitive to unusual circumstances.** No matter how much you'd like to think that the company or department comes first, people do have private lives and personal circumstances can affect their focus. Be sensitive within a reasonable period of time and then call them on it if they are not functioning up to par.

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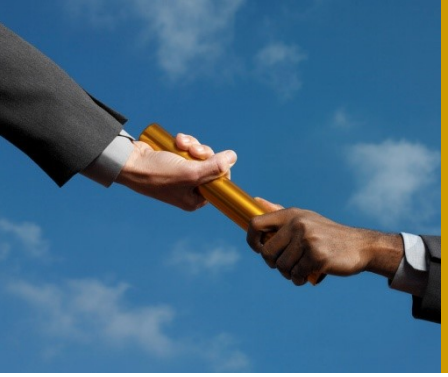

> "Imagine no limitations; decide what's right and desirable before you decide what's possible."
>
> - Brian Tracy

Successful Delegation

11. **Know your employees.** Choosing the right person for the project is the first step in delegation. In order to make this decision, you must know the skill level of each employee in your department. Which projects can they handle independently, or with a little guidance or access to additional resources? What are their interests? Employees tend to do well with projects that are both challenging and interesting.

12. **Establish objectives.** Clearly communicate your objectives to each employee involved in the project. Your objectives should be concrete, measurable, and concise. Write them down and review them yourself if necessary. Remember your role is to direct. Give your employees direction by letting them know precisely what is expected and what their role is in the process. Given this information, employees will work more independently.

13. **Give a deadline.** Deadlines should be given for any project worth doing. Be specific, strict and realistic when establishing deadlines. Without deadlines, employees will not feel responsible for accomplishing the task. Projects with a deadline are seen as important.

14. **Develop a method of reporting.** Establishing a reporting system will eliminate employees coming to you throughout the day for feedback. Decide the best method of reporting (meeting, e-mail, written report) and the time line (weekly, monthly, daily). It is important that each employee knows what information you want in the report.

15. **Focus on the results.** Let go of the details. Empower your employees to take care of the day-to-day details. Let them know where your main concern lies - with the final outcome.

16. **Keep a log of projects.** It is important that you know which projects are taking place, who is responsible for each one and the status of each one. The easiest way to monitor this is by keeping a log. At a glance you will have valuable information and can follow-up accordingly. You can also ensure that employees are assigned work equally.

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> "Delegating means letting others become the experts and hence the best."
>
> - Timothy Firnstahl

Successful Delegation (contd.)

17. **Encourage creativity and independence.** Don't get sucked into solving every problem an employee brings to you. Instead, ask them to bring ideas for solving the problem. Teach them to become problem solvers. Provide them with plenty of feedback and encouragement.

18. **Follow-up.** Never assign a project and forget about it until the deadline. Always communicate with your employees and don't forget to listen. Check in periodically to ensure the project is headed in the right direction.

19. **Provide resources.** Do your employees have the necessary resources needed to successfully finish the project? Resources include time, equipment, supplies, space and manpower. Set your employees up to win. Provide them with the necessary resources.

20. **Rejoice and review.** Once a project is finished, gather the team together for a moment to celebrate the success of the project. Demonstrate to the team how their work has affected the company/department. Discuss particular challenges faced during the course of the project and review the solutions used to overcome them. Recognise the team members for a job well done!

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> "I find the harder I work, the luckier I become."
>
> - Thomas Jefferson

Being an Effective Team Member

21. **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** If you have a problem with someone in your group, talk to him/her about it. Letting bad feelings brew will only make you sour and want to isolate yourself from the team. Not only does it feel good to get it out, but it will be better for the team in the long run.

22. **Don't blame others.** People in your team will lose respect for you if you're constantly blaming others for not meeting deadlines. You're not fooling anyone, people know who isn't pulling their weight. Pointing the finger will only make you look cowardly. Team members understand if you have a heavy workload and weren't able to meet a deadline. Saying something like, "I'm really sorry, but I'll get it to you by the end of today", will earn you a lot more respect than trying to make it seem like it's everyone else's fault that *you* missed *your* deadline.

23. **Support team member's ideas.** If a team-mate suggests something, always consider it – even if it's the worst idea you've ever heard! Considering the team's ideas shows you're interested in other people's ideas, not just your own. After all, nobody likes a know-it-all.

24. **No bragging.** It's one thing to rejoice in your successes as a team, it's another to be like a superstar. Doing this will make others regret your personal successes and may create tension within the team. You don't have to brag to let people know you've done a good job; people will already know. Have faith that people will recognise when good work is being done, and that they'll let you know how well you're doing. Your response? Something like "Thanks, that means a lot" is enough.

25. **Listen actively.** Look at the person who's speaking to you, nod, ask probing questions and acknowledge what's said by paraphrasing points that have been made. If you're unclear about something that's been said, ask for more information to clear up any confusion before moving on. Effective communication is a vital part of any team, so the value of good listening skills shouldn't be underestimated.

26. **Get involved.** Share suggestions, ideas, solutions and proposals with your team members. Take the time to help your fellow team-mates. You can guarantee there will be a time in the future when you'll need some help or advice. If you've helped them in the past, they'll be more than happy to lend a helping hand.

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> "It is amazing what can be accomplished when nobody cares about who gets the credit."
>
> - Robert Yates

Being an Effective Team Member (contd.)

27. **Positive contribution to team process and goals.** Some team members may be willing to take a back seat - saying "it's the leader's role to tell us what to do!" This is symptomatic of a work group rather than a team. Great team members will support the team with suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the team process or new ideas for delivering the team goals. This can lead to the leadership being shared around, as different team members drive the process at different times.

28. **Willingness to take responsibility for elements of the team's work.** Team members should be willing to run with elements of the team's work - taking away tasks from the main group to work on. These might not only be tasks, but could also include elements of team development.

29. **No finger pointing.** Don't allow problems to become personal. Focus on problems, not on people. Also while it's okay to challenge, stretch and question; but when a decision is made, everyone must stand behind the decision as a team. What happens in the room, stays in the room; outside the room, the team must remain unified. This means no gossiping or badmouthing a team member to outsiders.

30. **Delivering on commitments.** If an individual is to be fully valued by the team, they must be committed to the success of the team. If they agree to carry out action steps at team meetings, there is an expectation that these will be carried out, unless that expectation is changed. If at the following team meeting, the team is surprised by an individual not delivering on what they agreed, there is a danger that they will lose trust in the individual.

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> "The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it" - Theodore Roosevelt

Effective Teams

31. **Develop a vision.** Identify the challenging vision and inspiring goals you want your team to achieve. Get all team members involved in helping to write these.

32. **Identify a common purpose.** Team members and Management should have clarity on the common purpose of the project and the reason why the individuals are being brought together. We should not stop with identifying the goal of the project; we should arrive at the importance of the project to the business goals of the organisation. How does this project fit into the bigger picture of the mission and vision of the business?

33. **Assign clear roles and responsibilities** along with clear definitions of what is expected of each individual in the team. What are the roles that this team needs to have and who will perform the various functions of each role. This has to be clear and well defined. Once this is done, each one knows what s/he should contribute towards the success of the team. Each team has certain activities that must be finished within a schedule. Ensure that the person who is assigned the activity is committed to completing it within the schedule.

34. **Create team spirit.** View your employees as being professionals on a team and not as "my employees or my staff". They want to feel important and significant, not just a hired hand.

35. **Be observant and listen** between the lines of the words your team members are saying. Don't be too quick to respond to a question without trying to really hear what the question is about. Even if you know the answer, listen respectfully and hear out their question. This will help you open up communications between you and your team. Lack of proper communication is quoted as the main reason for teams and business failures. Creating an excellent workable plan is just half the story: keeping the whole team aware of what's going on, is the other half. For this, we require regular meetings and discussions.

36. **Give some, to get the mission accomplished.** The way a task is handled, may not be exactly the way you wanted it handled. However, if it gets done in an acceptable way, don't be too quick to say "I think you should have done it my way." This of course depends on the situation. Sometimes newer managers get caught up with wanting to show the worker who is the boss (They already know). Your role needs to be supportive and provide assistance and direction. You're not giving up control; but allowing creativity of letting them do their work.

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> "Coming together is a beginning.
> Keeping together is progress.
> Working together is success."
>
> - Henry Ford

Effective Teams (contd.)

37. **Trust to be trusted.** Trust your team members, and they will trust you. Be wary of them; and they will live up to your expectations. The main point is to respect them as professionals and give them the tools and time to do the job. Be careful that you allow the room to make and correct mistakes without killing their self esteems. Sure we want them to be professional and not mess up. But they, just as you, will make a mistake. If you always hammer them for every mistake, you will start seeing them pass the blame.

38. **Delegate decision-making.** With the plan and roles clearly defined, the team just has to get on with the act. There will be multiple places where they have to take decisions on how to proceed, how to handle unexpected contingencies. Give them the freedom to make decisions. They should feel free to consult or discuss things with you but as a manager the best help you can give them is to ask appropriate questions and lead them to arrive at the answer and solution themselves.

39. **Provide feedback and celebrate accomplishments.** Be sure to tell your people how they are doing in as timely manner – not six months after the fact. There are no stronger modifiers of behaviour than immediate positive or negative reinforcement. Also share good news. Have a party. Make noise about it. Let everyone know when the team or a team member does something really noteworthy. After all, you celebrate when your favourite sports team wins!

40. **Support their needs.** If a person on your team asks for a piece of equipment, a resource, or additional training, don't always make them justify your multiple questions as to why they need it. It will kill morale. If you can't get what they need at the time, say so because of funds or whatever the reason. If it seems remotely helpful to them, get it. It will let them know you trust them and want to be supportive.

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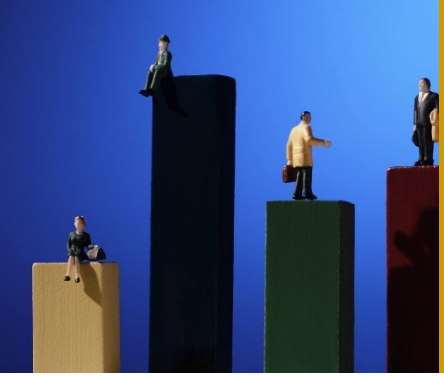

> "If you put good people in bad systems, you get bad results. You have to water the flowers you want to grow."
>
> - Stephen Covey

Conducting Staff Appraisals

41. **Be prepared.** Set a date for the appraisal and stick to it. Cancelling or postponing it could convey the message that it is not that important. Allow plenty of time for preparation in advance of the meeting.

42. **Book a meeting room** or space where any discussion will not be overheard and where you will not be interrupted. Switch off your mobile phone and ensure somebody else fields your calls, and allocate a reasonable period of time for the meeting.

43. **Don't do all the talking.** Employ interviewing and coaching skills of listening and questioning. A good indication is that you as owner manager should be doing about 20% of the talking.

44. **Celebrate accomplishments.** Starting with a blank pad of paper, note down the individual's accomplishments in the past quarter. Ask the person what was achieved and write each item down, no matter how small. People have a tendency to describe their own achievements in humble terms. Change their language to truly reflect the size / importance of each success.

45. **Demonstrate that you have been paying attention.** People forget, overlook or are not aware that things they have done were important. Managers often fail to give feedback in real time, too. Search your memory banks for these achievements and add them to the list. Focus particularly on soft skills such as team building, negotiating and conflict resolution which merit mention even though they will never be set as anyone's objectives. They will feel valued and have a better appreciation for what is important to you as a result.

46. **If you need to raise difficult issues** prepare well in advance with the objective of seeking positive outcomes. Encourage staff to find their own solutions and aim to strike a balance in your appraisal – don't focus on the negative aspects.

47. **Negotiate areas for employee improvement.** Ask the employee what he / she would like to work on in the next quarter. Don't limit topics to the four corners of the job description. Career concerns and life balance are also legitimate topics. If the individual has not mentioned an area which you would like to have prioritised, verbally add it to the list stating the benefit the person will derive from making the change(s) you envisage. Negotiate one or two items that the person will commit to work on in order of priority. No one can effectively focus on more than two behaviours or skills at a time.

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> "Just the act of listening means more than you can imagine to most employees."
>
> - Bob Nelson

Conducting Staff Appraisals (contd.)

48. **Set measurable, time limited goals.** The number one reason for employee disillusionment with their performance appraisal is not knowing what is expected of them. "I didn't know" can range from a total absence of stated objectives at one end of the scale; to goals that are stated in subjective or undefined terms at the other. When you draft objectives, ask yourself if each one contains a completion date and is measurable, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Explain how you will know the goal has been achieved – what do you need to hear, see or receive, to know it has been achieved. People will work towards expectations - whenever they are set. If you set high expectations, employees will meet them. By the same token, if you set low expectations, those will be met too!

49. **Keep a record.** At the end of the meeting, sum up the key points covered and agree an action plan. Don't wait for the next appraisal to come round to ensure that key issues are tackled and resolved.

50. **Do it again next quarter.** Now you both know what to expect and will be prepared for the next discussion. Be sure to note progress on next quarter's list of accomplishments. As the process is repeated during the year, the time required for each review will diminish because the habit is ingrained. You will have the opportunity to take timely corrective actions or award incentives. Best of all, quarterly feedback sessions take the edge off of annual reviews. Employees know how their performance is perceived and managers give ample notice and opportunity for employee development and growth.

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> "You don't change other people. You change you. When you change you, your whole world changes. Build a better you!"
>
> - Zig Ziglar

Determine What Causes Problem Behaviour in the Workplace

51. **Inadequate standards, training, or too much responsibility too soon.** Employees take their cue from you, their boss. If you haven't set clear standards, or haven't seen to it that your employees have the training needed to do their jobs, the results will show up in sloppy work habits, lagging productivity, poor quality work, and confusion.

52. **Conflicting objectives.** Congruity between individual and business objectives, is imperative for a smoothly managed operation. It is the manager's responsibility to help establish the connections between these two sometimes opposite poles. If employees do not perceive that they have an identifiable contribution to the business, their enthusiasm and effort will wane and their unspoken or obvious resistance will rise.

53. **Failure to "walk your talk".** Ego, arrogance, and differences between what is said and what is done, are in conflict with effective leadership. They are triggers that are likely to set off employee resentment and sabotage.

54. **Tolerating laziness and lack of motivation** can lead to average performance at best and, at worst, behaviours that soon get out of control, such as moaning and finger-pointing. Strong motivation and exceptional performance follow high self-esteem.

55. **Sharing your weaknesses.** Some managers attempt to build support by sharing their problems, fears, and shortcomings with their employees. Predictably, the results of these efforts are usually the opposite from those anticipated. Employees resent the thought their boss is less than a successful professional.

56. **Intolerance of failure.** Managers who accept only successes from their employees create an environment where caution rather than risk prevails. Failure, in many cases, is simply the price that must be paid for learning and for subsequently higher performance.

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"We must become the change we want to see."

- Mahatma Gandhi

Determine What Causes Problem Behaviour in the Workplace (contd.)

57. **Dishonesty.** The media reporting over recent years surrounding this area, suggests that ethical behaviour and honesty have not been adequately recognised as contributing to long term corporate success. While the issue may be grey when viewed from the executive suite, for those at the working level, it is clearly black and white.

58. **Lack of discipline by example.** In this age of flat organisations and cross-functional teams, discipline is instilled more by example than by title. The manager who arrives late and leaves early, or accepts less than accurate work from himself or others, has no cause to complain when the work of his/her staff is below par.

59. **Leading by instruction rather than discovery.** If you, as a manager, aren't aware of the difference between these two, and are not willing to forgo the first in favour of the second, you can anticipate problems with your employees. One role of the manager is to teach.

60. **"Stepping over" problems.** Bosses who procrastinate in dealing with employee problems can expect to see them multiply and expand.

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"Life has two rules: number 1, never quit, number 2, always remember rule 1."

- Duke Ellington

Dealing With Employee Problem Behaviour

61. **Recognise that problem behaviour usually has a history.** It usually develops over time and seldom from a single incident. As a manager, it is your responsibility to be alert to the early warning signs and deal with the underlying causes before the situation reaches a crisis.

62. **Ask yourself: "Am I partly or wholly responsible?"** You would be surprised how frequently it is the manager who has created, or at least contributed to problems of employee behaviour. Having an abrasive style, being unwilling to listen, and being inattentive to the nuances of employee behaviour are all factors that contribute to the manager's need to thoroughly examine what is going on.

63. **Don't focus only on the overt behaviour.** When confronted by an angry employee, it's easy to attack the person and target the behaviour rather than examine the factors that underlie the behaviour. Often, this takes patience, careful probing, and a willingness to forgo judgment until you really understand the situation.

64. **Be attentive to the "awkward silence" and to what is not said.** When an employee is obviously reluctant to communicate, it's almost a sure sign that more lurks beneath the surface. Often, employees will hold back because they feel unsafe. They may test the waters by airing a less severe or kindred issue in order to see what kind of a response they get. In order to get the full story and encourage forthrightness, it's imperative that the manager read between the lines and offer the concern and support necessary to get the employee to open up.

65. **Clarify before you confront.** Chances are, when an issue first surfaces, you will be given only a fragmented and partial picture of the problem. You may have to dig deep to surface important facts, and talk to others who may be involved. One safe assumption is that each person will tend to present the case from his or her viewpoint, which may or may not be the way it really is. Discretion and careful fact -finding are often required to get a true picture.

66. **Be willing to explore the possibility that you have contributed to the problem.** This isn't easy, even if you have reason to believe it's so, because you may not be fully aware of what you have done to fuel the fire. Three helpful questions to ask yourself: "Is this problem unique, or has it happened before?", "Are others in my company exhibiting similar behaviours?", and finally, "Am I partially the cause of the behaviour I am criticising in others?"

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> "If fear alters behaviour, you're already defeated."
>
> - Brenda Hammond

Dealing With Employee Problem Behaviour (contd.)

67. **Plan your strategy.** Start by defining, for yourself, what changes you would like to see take place, then, follow this sequence: (1) Tell the person that there is a problem. State the problem as you understand it and explain why it is important that it be resolved; (2) Gain agreement that you've defined the problem correctly, and that the employee understands that it must be solved; (3) Ask for solutions, using open-ended questions such as: "What are you willing to do to correct this problem?" In some cases, you may have to make it clear what you expect; (4) Get a dedication that the employee will take the required actions; (5) Set deadlines for finishing the actions. In the case of a repeated problem, you may want to advise the employee of the consequences of failing to take corrective action; (6) Follow up on the deadlines you've set.

68. **Treat the employee as an adult and expect adult behaviour.** To some extent, expectation defines the result. If you indicate, by your actions or by the content or tone of your voice, that you expect less than full adult behaviour, that's what you're likely to get.

69. **Treat interpersonal conflicts differently.** If the problem behaviour stems from a personality conflict between two employees, have each one answer these questions: (1) How would you describe the other person? (2) How does he or she make you feel? (3) Why do you feel that the other person behaves the way he/she does? (4) What might you be able to do to alleviate the situation? (5) What would you like the other person to do in return?

70. **Seek agreement regarding steps to be taken and results expected.** Nothing is really "fixed" unless it stays fixed. All parties to a dispute must agree that the steps taken (or proposed) will substantially alleviate the problem. Further, they must agree on what they will do IF the results attained are not as anticipated. This can be achieved by doing a simple role play, i.e. having each side (including your own) articulate the steps to be taken and the outcomes anticipated. That way, even if subsequent events are significantly different than expected, the lines of communication for adjusting the situation are opened.

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> "Life is like riding a bicycle.
> To keep your balance you must keep moving."
>
> - Albert Einstein

Effectively Manage Change in Your Business

71. **Remember the human element.** While most organisations focus on deciding what to change to improve company performance and quality, the human element of executing these decisions is often left unattended. To successfully implement major change, companies must find the connection between the organisation, the team member, and the change initiatives being introduced.

72. **Be supportive.** Define the topic and needs, establish impact, and initiate a plan. Get a commitment, confront excuses/resistance, and clarify consequences. Don't punish and don't give up.

73. **Have meetings at least once a week** including all members who will be impacted by or are driving the process together in the same room. Build skills in communication such that the real conversations can be held on a regular basis.

74. **Identify information important to the people in your organisation.** Determine what format your staff would most appreciate this information. Proactively obtain and provide this information to your staff as a way of partnering with them.

75. **Consider your people.** Change rarely affects one person; in most cases it affects many people at once. Change experienced as a group can become either a supportive, unifying experience or a negative, frustrating one. Consider what kind of group you want to be a part of, and then seek to make it so, through your words and actions.

76. **Focus on one change at a time.** While we can learn to accept and manage change, dealing with numerous changes all at once can become too overwhelming, even for the most flexible of us.

77. **Take control.** Change is stressful because it threatens your people's sense of control. Face new challenges head-on. Focus on how you can make it work for all. You will feel empowered by your renewed sense of control when you stop allowing change to overcome you, and instead overcome change through hard work and steady determination.

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> "The winner is the chef who takes the same ingredients as everyone else and produces the best results."
>
> - Edward de Bono

Effectively Manage Change in Your Business (contd.)

78. **Build Support.** For effective change, provide as much information as possible, to as many employees as possible, about the business. Share financial information, customer feedback, results, industry projections and challenges, and data from processes you measure. An informed workforce will understand and agree with the need for change.

79. **Create urgency around the need to change.** Project for your people what will happen if you don't make the changes needed. Communicate this information honestly and use data whenever it is available. You do have compelling reasons for making the changes? Right?

80. **Exercise patience with yourself.** When things change significantly, accept that you will not be able to master them all right away. If you're dealing with updated computer systems, a shake-up in business operations, or any other major business change, things will take time. Give yourself a break, and don't add to your stress by trying to become a whiz at everything overnight.

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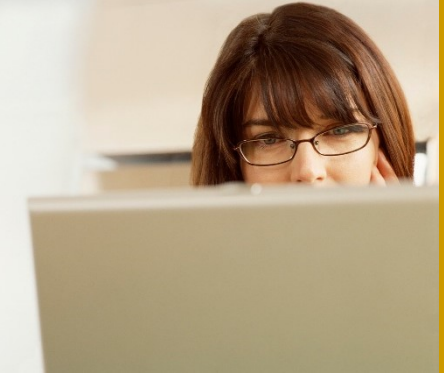

> "Let our advance worrying become our advance thinking and planning."
>
> - Winston Churchill

Effectively Manage Change For Yourself

81. **Accept change as a fact of life.** As human beings we are constantly in process. We never get there, our in-box is never empty, and we can't catch up with technology. Our world is changing at a pace never experienced before…indeed, change is our only constant…accept it!

82. **Commit yourself to lifelong learning.** If change is constant, then learning must also be continual. As long as we are learning we're on the road to an exciting, fulfilling, meaningful life. Learning helps us feel as though we're moving with the ever-changing world. This helps to relieve our anxiety of feeling left behind. We feel better because when we're learning we are moving with the world.

83. **Get healthy, then stay healthy.** Change, even positive change, is stressful. To keep stress from getting to us, we must stay physically healthy with proper nutrition, enough rest and regular exercise.

84. **Look at change as an opportunity.** Changing our attitude about change, is one of our best management tools. Look for opportunities in every change in your life. Rather than digging in your heels and resisting change, allow yourself to flow with it and see where it takes you.

85. **Develop and maintain a strong network and support team.** Many changes in our lives require us to lean on others for emotional support and/or advice. Have your team in place…ready to see you through the inevitable significant changes in your life.

86. **Learn from the mistakes.** Past mistakes are always repeated in a recognisable pattern. Look for the pattern.

87. **Let go** of the things you do not control and take a graceful exit.

88. **Eliminate the tolerations in your life.** Get rid of the little irritations (and sometimes big ones) that drain your energy…energy you need to manage change. A toleration can be something as simple as associating with a person that is consistently negative.

89. **Keep a diary of significant events.** When change is viewed over a period of time there is more sense to it. Seeing this historical perspective of past change in our life, can give us more objectivity to meet the current changes that are facing us.

90. **Decide that,** regardless of whether or not you have any control in your work situation, you can choose to become a change participant or a change victim.

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> "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one getting burned."
>
> - Buddha

Tips to Reduce Stress

91. **Take a mini vacation.** Close your eyes and imagine being at your favourite relaxing spot. Really be there, feel the sensations and hear the sounds.

92. **Breathing Exercises.** Deep breathing is an easy stress reliever that has numerous benefits for the body, including oxygenating the blood, which 'wakes up' the brain, relaxing muscles and quieting the mind. Breathing exercises are especially helpful because you can do them anywhere, and they work quickly so you can de-stress in a flash.

93. **Meditation builds on deep breathing, and takes it a step further.** When you meditate, your brain enters an area of functioning that's similar to sleep, but carries some added benefits you can't achieve as well, in any other state, including the release of certain hormones that promote health. Also, the mental focus on nothingness keeps your mind from working overtime and increasing your stress level.

94. **Visualisations building on guided imagery.** You can also imagine yourself achieving goals like becoming healthier and more relaxed, doing well at tasks, and handling conflict in better ways. Also, visualising yourself doing well on tasks you're trying to master actually functions like physical practice, so you can improve your performance through visualisations as well!

95. **Exercise.** Many people exercise to control weight and get in better physical condition to become healthier or physically attractive, but exercise and stress management are also closely linked. Exercise provides a distraction from stressful situations, as well as an outlet for frustrations, and gives you a lift via endorphins as well.

96. **Progressive muscle relaxation.** By tensing and relaxing all the muscle groups in your body, you can relieve tension and feel much more relaxed in minutes, with no special training or equipment. Start by tensing all the muscles in your face, holding a tight grimace for ten seconds, then completely relaxing for ten seconds. Repeat this with your neck, followed by your shoulders, etc. You can do this anywhere, and as you practice, you will find you can relax more quickly and easily, reducing tension as quickly as it starts!

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> "Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop."
>
> - Ovid

Tips to Reduce Stress (contd.)

97. **Organise home and work space:** You would be surprised by how much unnecessary stress comes from living and working in a cluttered, disorganised environment! Taking the time to create a serene, organised atmosphere will provide more of a payoff than you probably realise, and is well worth the effort! Before you know it, your home or business will be a sanctuary from stress rather than a cause of it!

98. **Becoming more assertive can help you reduce stress in many ways.** It can help you keep relationships strong so you can benefit from social support and handle conflict more peacefully. More importantly, it can help you easily maintain healthy boundaries so you're not taking on more than you can handle because you're not able to say no.

99. **Practice optimistic thinking and positive self talk.** You may not be aware of how much your thoughts influence your stress level, but how you view the world and even how you talk to yourself can colour your world and significantly affect the level of stress you experience in a given situation or day. Fortunately, you can alter your internal dialogue and view of the world so that you experience less stress in everyday situations and during crises. Surround yourself with positive energy and develop positive self-talk habits - and lower your stress level!

100. **Find more time in your schedule.** These days, many of us have schedules that are packed to the hilt! Sadly, most of the time, our busy schedules don't include all that we need to be happy (i.e. time alone, time for exercise, time for friendships), or even reflect our values and personalities. Assess your schedule, see if you're too busy or imbalanced with how you spend your time, and find more time in your schedule so the level of stress you experience can go down, and you'll have time to incorporate the activities that really fulfil you, into your lifestyle.

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