

Declare your Independence from Chaos

By Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®, Chief Cheetah, Cheetah Learning

It's easy to get caught up in the speed of our hectic lifestyles both at home and at work. If you're finding that stress and chaos is becoming the norm, it's time to transform the storm into calm.

Here are a few tips that I use to manage my stress and keep projects flowing in all aspects of my life.

1) Identify where the stress is coming from.

If you find yourself regularly saying, "I'm stressed," but not doing anything to change your environment or behavior, you may be running at full speed without thinking about where the stress is coming from. For example, are you saying, "yes" to everything and overloading your calendar? Are you working long hours without a break and feeling cheated because there is no personal time? Are you part of the sandwich generation caring for both your own children and your parents at the same time? Before you develop a plan, you need to pinpoint your key stressors.

2) Build a support team.

Many times, we get stressed because we've taken everything onto our own shoulders without asking for help and tapping into our support network. If you think of stress management as a project, your support team is the team helping you manage this project. When you look at the areas where you've identified your stress as coming from, this will help you pinpoint who are the people you need on your support team. They are probably already there for you, but you're not asking them for help. If your biggest stress is coming from work, think of a colleague, mentor or advocate who can talk you through it and help you come up with new strategies for approaching the challenge.

3) Catch your ZZZZ's.

While getting very little sleep may have been a badge of honor in college (or even in some companies), don't buy into this myth. Sleep deprivation reduces your concentration and overall effectiveness. It's difficult to come up with a sound solution or keep your cool on three hours of sleep. Try to go to sleep at the same time every night as much as possible. Let your brain cool down before you go to bed and separate from challenging work a few hours before you go to sleep. Also cut back on caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and sugar, which affect some people's sleeping patterns.

4) Find joy in exercise.

If you hate the gym, you're never going to go there. So, knowing that exercise is one of the great stress-busters, you need to find joy in exercise for yourself.

Maybe it's as simple as taking a walk down a favorite street or road. You may get the yoga itch and fall in love with those stretches and poses. Whatever works for you, give your brain a boost, and take a break from both the computer and whatever is weighing heavily on your mind with a frequent exercise break that becomes a routine you cherish.

5) De-stress your environment.

Do you have the right balance of quiet time for concentration and interaction with key team-members or family members? Make sure your furniture (especially at work) is designed to support you and properly adjusted. Are you working in the right light, so you are not straining your eyes? Look at your environment and see what relaxes and comforts you and what causes you additional stress.

6) Break for relaxation.

You know that person that you admire because s/he is always at ease and seems like a Zen master? If you ask that person, how s/he does it, you'll usually unearth a couple of golden nuggets tucked away. I've always used deep-breathing techniques to relax me – especially when I'm getting ready for an important meeting. Meditation and imagery work well too. It's amazing how just five minutes of closing your eyes and going to your favorite beach or location will completely take you away and bring you back refreshed. In our classes, we incorporate breathing techniques, yoga stretches and relaxing music. Our students always tell us what a difference this made for them as they were studying and preparing for the PMP exam.

7) Make Fun a Part of your Life.

What is really fun for you, and more importantly, when was the last time you had fun? If fun is relegated to a handful of times a year, you need to make a commitment to enjoying yourself more and making that part of your Stress Management Plan.

8) Design your Stress-Less Management Plan.

Use the seven tips above to develop your Stress-Less Management Plan. These tips will help you get your ideas formulated and pinpoint what you need to work on to lower your stress level, increase your relaxation time and most importantly – have more fun with the people you love.

Now, put your computer to sleep for five minutes and visualize yourself in your favorite spot drinking a bottle of water and smiling. May your visions bring you peace, prosperity and the ability to create a stress-free space no matter where you are!

About the Know How Network and Cheetah Learning

The Know How Network is a monthly column written by Michelle LaBrosse, the founder and Chief Cheetah of Cheetah Learning. Distributed to hundreds of newsletters and media outlets around the world, the Know How Network brings the promise, purpose and passion of Project Management to people everywhere. Visit www.cheetahlearning.com to learn more about Cheetah PM, the fastest way to learn about Project Management and get your PMP. You can also get your career in gear with CheetahWare, free Project Management tools from Cheetah Learning.

About the Author



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is the founder of Cheetah Learning, and author of *Cheetah Negotiations* and *Cheetah Project Management*. The Project Management Institute, www.pmi.org, recently selected Michelle as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the World, and only one of two women selected from the training and education industry. She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School's Owner President Managers (OPM) program and also holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton. Cheetah Learning is a virtual company and has 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide.

Her articles have appeared in over 100 publications from around the world. Her monthly column, the Know How Network is carried by 400 publications, and her monthly newsletter subscription list includes more than 50,000 people. To date, more than 30,000 people have become "Cheetahs" using Cheetah Learning's innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Michelle has been running her company virtually for the past 20 years. She has grown the company 100 fold in the past 20 years, and she credits her success to using the Cheetah Project Management method to better manage both people and technology. Michelle's mission is to help people achieve great results, FAST, by making it fast, easy and fun to learn and do Project Management.

She lives in Nevada with her family and likes to rejuvenate in Alaska where you'll often find her kayaking, golfing or hiking.