

Talking Yourself Out Of Stress

By Jay D. Rohman

It was midnight Sunday night and Bill Jones was unable to get to sleep. He had been lying in bed tossing and turning for several hours now. He was so disruptive that his wife Marge finally went to lie down in the spare bedroom so she could get some sleep. But sleep eluded Bill. All he could think about was the pile of work on his desk in his office. Then there was the manager from the corporate office that was coming into town on Wednesday expecting to see the project proposal that he was working on. He had brought some work home with him to try to get done over the weekend, but when he arrived home on Friday night he felt like a load had been lifted from his shoulders. He just couldn't bring himself to mess with it. He'd had a great weekend spending time with his wife and even watched a little football. Now here it was Sunday night and he'd had that knot in his stomach since 9 O'clock that evening when he decided to go to bed. How was he going to get everything done!

About 2 a.m. Marge was startled awake by what sounded like a cry of pain. She rushed into the master bedroom to find Bill doubled up on the floor in a fetal position clutching his chest. She called an ambulance and Bill was rushed to the hospital. After an examination in the emergency room by his doctor he was given a sedative and placed in a private room for the night for observation. The doctor told Marge that Bill had what was called a heart arrhythmia. He was lucky. A heart arrhythmia can be fatal or he could have had a heart attack. Marge couldn't understand why Bill would have these heart problems. He was only 30 years old and was quite active athletically. He would run 3 to 5 miles a day, played basketball in a league at the gym, and watched what he ate. How could this have happened?

What Bill and Marge didn't realize was that stress was slowly killing Bill. The majority of heart attacks experienced occur either on Sunday night or Monday morning. The reason behind this is that they have worked their bodies into such a frenzy thinking about having to go back to work on Monday morning that they become stressed out. Stress causes your blood pressure to increase, closes your blood vessels, speeds up the rate that the blood clots, and triggers arrhythmias. It is considered one of the major risk factors for heart disease. You can be the picture of perfect health, but if you allow stress to run rampant in your life, it's like holding a loaded gun to your head.

So what is stress? There are two kinds of stress. Good stress and bad stress. Dr. Allen Elkin, Founder of the Stress Management and Counseling Center in New York City defines stress in his book 'Stress Management For Dummies' as "what you experience when you believe you cannot cope effectively with a threatening situation". We'll use this definition for bad stress. Bad stress is the kind that you experience for long periods of time that eat away at your body's immune system. Good stress is what activates the body for a short period of time to effectively cope with a threatening or competitive situation. Do you see the difference?

So how can you control stress in your life so that it doesn't continue to eat away at your health, or worse yet, kill you? It all has to do with what you say to yourself. Epictetus, a philosopher from the early second century wrote, "People are not disturbed by things, but by their perception of things." As humans, we

look at a situation and try to decide how we feel about it. Our mind goes over millions of stored pieces of information pertaining to our past experience with similar circumstances. We go over in our minds how we felt then and why we need to feel that way now. If it was a good situation, we start talking 'feel good' things to ourselves and start to feel good. But if it was a bad situation, we start to talk 'feel bad' things or 'feel stressed' things to ourselves. Before you know it, we are feeling bad or stressed out! Every minute of every day we are talking to ourselves and telling ourselves how to feel based upon our perception of a situation. So if you're in a perceived 'stressed' situation, how do you get out of it? I'm glad you asked!

Very simply, you talk yourself out of it. Start telling yourself 'good things' about what is happening. Start looking for the thread of gold hidden in the approaching chaos. Build yourself up with positive affirmations and start looking for the good that is coming out of you. Get out of the rut of telling yourself how much you hate what is going on, or how inadequate that you are feeling. Instead, start looking forward to facing the situation that is approaching. Think of it as a challenge to see how tough you are. It doesn't matter whether you are male or female, young or old. Race, religion, or creed have nothing to do with it. It all has to do with how you tell yourself you feel about the situation.

What you say to yourself can be a matter of life and death. Choose life!

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