

The **EDGE**

Stress & Performance Toolkit

June 2023

In a longitudinal stress study...

30,000

American adults were tracked in the study conducted over 8 years

They were asked:

How much stress have you experienced in the last year?

Do you believe stress is harmful to your health?

At the end of 8 years,

Researchers consulted public death records to see if the belief in stress had an impact on participants

Here's the bad news...

Of those who said they experienced a lot of stress in the last year,

43% of them had an increased risk of dying

But!...

... this was only true

if they believed that stress is harmful for your health

The good news is...

Those who didn't believe stress was harmful to their health

had the lowest risk of death!

So we conclude that...

... Stress related deaths are

correlated with the belief that physiological stress effects are bad

for your overall health

Cover the BASICS by strengthening your mental state

The seven essential mental activities



Sleep time

Giving the brain rest and recovery

Focus time

Setting goals and dealing with challenges

Physical time

Strengthening the brain's plasticity

Connecting time

Building and developing relationships

Play time

Being creative, enjoying new experiences

Time in

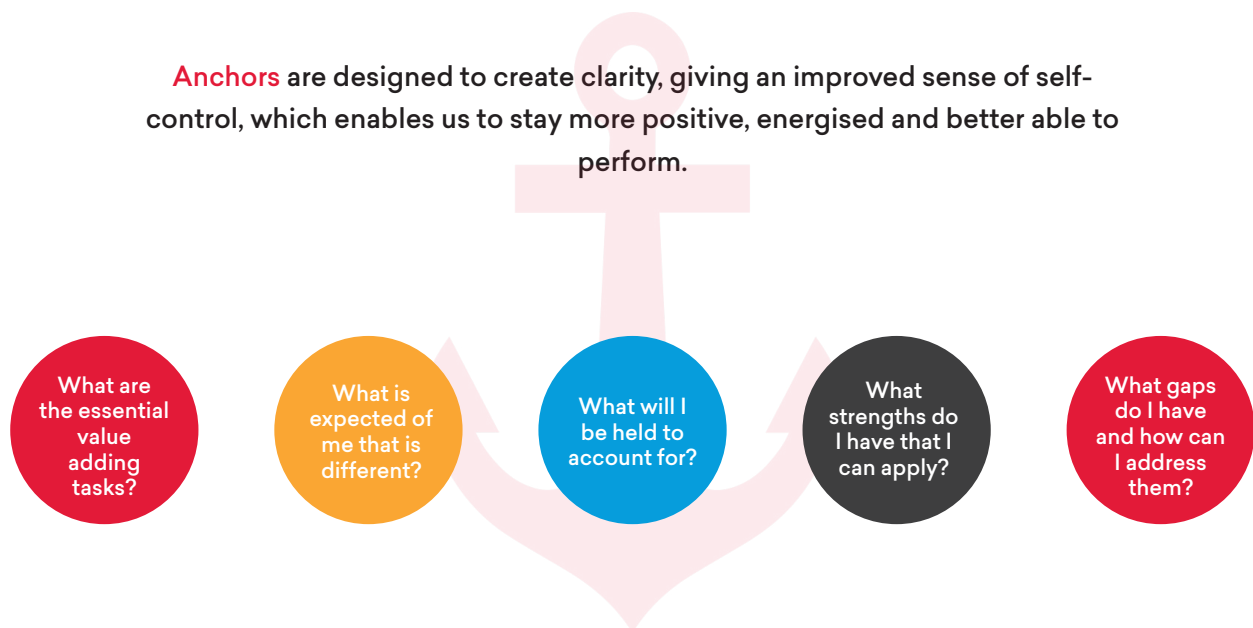
Reflecting and self managing

Down time

Relaxing and being totally present

Use anchors to provide clarity

Anchors are designed to create clarity, giving an improved sense of self-control, which enables us to stay more positive, energised and better able to perform.



These help create stabilisation

Planning ahead for stressful situations

The bigger picture

To ensure the greatest output of your energy, understand the bigger purpose of your priorities

Predict crunch times

Crunch times are intense periods of work. **Be mindful of project timelines** and consider what you can outsource in advance.

Give clear Priorities

Everything being urgent is overwhelming and unproductive.

Help your teams make choices about where to focus.

Break projects down into **milestones and manageable steps** make it easier to reach goals.

Delegate, postpone, or eliminate

Teach your people how to assess tasks:

- Is it important? Will it keep us on track? Will it relieve pressure?
- Does it help you move forward?

If not, check if you can delegate, postpone or eliminate the tasks.

Dealing with stress



Pause & R.U.L.E.R

Acknowledge your emotions & manage your state



Breathing

4-2-6 technique to center yourself and return your heart rate to normal, reducing the likelihood of adrenaline being released into the body



The Silent Scream

Dispersing any built-up adrenaline and tension to return the body to a calm, collected state

Stress Management

**In the
moment**



**Work
& Home**



**Cultivating a
positive mindset**



The nature of stress

Pressure and stress are unavoidable and we deal with a variety of things on a daily basis, in one way or another. However, the ability to understand the nature of stress and recognise our reaction to it when it's happening is what's needed to manage its impact on us both mentally and physically. If you're expending energy on irrelevant things or negative thought patterns, you're taxing your brain unnecessarily and wasting this precious resource.

In reality, the key is *not* to eliminate stress, but instead find the ways in which to manage it and its associated emotions in a healthy and productive way.

Changing our relationship with stress

Allowing stress to take over can inflict direct damage on our career, relationships and well being. But when taken as something to learn from, stress can be:

- A great motivator
- A source of strength
- A survival instinct that pushes us beyond our conceived limits

Stress is experienced internally, and as such changing your response to it is actually within your ability – if you know how.

If you're expending energy on irrelevant things or negative thought patterns, you are taxing your brain unnecessarily and wasting this precious resource.

Stress vs Control

Stress is not necessarily the result of the heavy workload, the demanding boss, or the “traffic jam” of unfinished projects. It occurs when the demands of a situation exceed your perceived ability to control them. The more you perceive you can control, the lower your stress levels, and vice versa.

It’s very important to know what you have influence and control over in your life to determine how and when to react to stress. When you control a situation, you influence the outcome. Every time you exercise control

you determine what happens in your brain, body, and the situation itself. In a confident and calm state, you work faster, solve problems more easily, and make fewer mistakes.

You can create immediate and dramatic shifts in your effectiveness and stress level by exerting control in small situations throughout the day. But before you can do that, you need to be able to determine what you can and can’t control along with what you can and can’t influence.

Matrix of Influence & Control

Using the matrix on the next page, map out your current stressors to determine what you can only influence and what you have neither influence nor control over. Once you’ve filled out your matrix, read the notes below on how to start taking action over your stressors:

Control + Influence

The things within your control and influence which are stressing you out you must take action on, whether that’s killing the task, changing the perimeters, delegating, etc.

See page 26 for an exercise that might help you organise this.

No Control + Influence

The things you can’t control but have some influence over you must influence but then let go – you can’t control the outcome so it’s important to recognise that.

Remember, it’s our perception of control or rather lack of control over a situation that’s what stresses us out. However, xif we have never had control in the first place, it’s important to acknowledge that we can’t dictate the outcome.

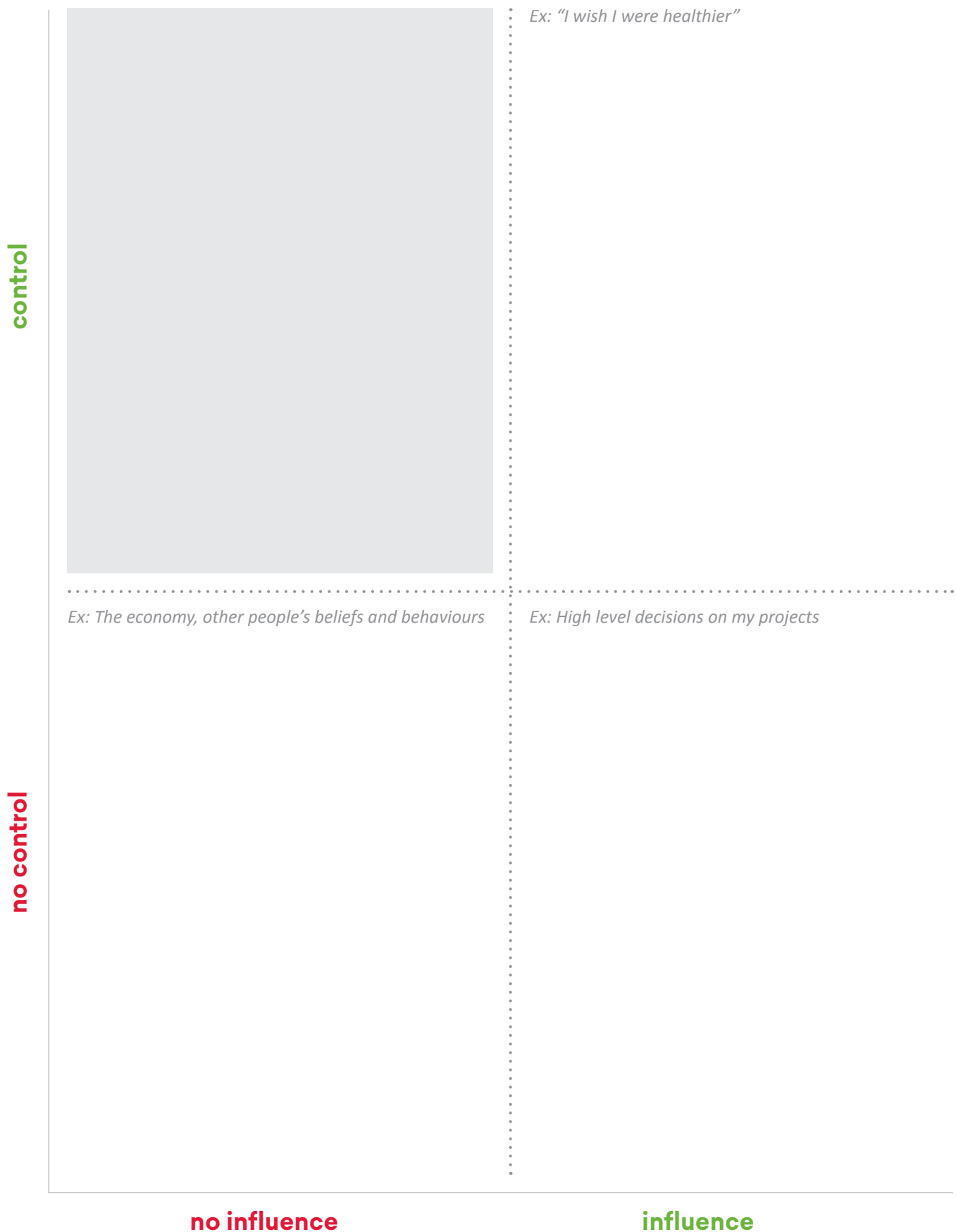
Once we’ve influenced as much as we can, we must let go and accept the outcome for what it is.

No Control + No Influence

For the situations or events stressing us that are both out of your influence and control, we need to adopt a more ‘zen’ attitude and really LET GO of the anxiety.

Meditation and mindfulness helps create space between stressors and our reaction to them. But allowing something we have neither influence nor control over affect our emotions, our stress levels and overall well-being is irrational – we must practice and perfect the art of ‘letting go’.

Matrix of Control & Influence



Managing stress in the moment

When you're feeling overwhelmed and need a mental break to reboot or refresh your brain or if you're feeling anxious, nervous or stressed about something or someone, consider these quick easy methods to get yourself back on track.



In the moment

- **If you're in conflict with someone**, first, don't judge the other person because you don't know what else might be contributing to the tension outside of the situation. Next, take a deep breath and demonstrate openness by helping them verbalise their needs and encouraging them to share. You can ask questions like:
"Where is your uncertainty coming from?"
"What can I do to help you right now?"
"Tell me more about why you're feeling that."
Above all, *listen* to what they're saying instead of planning your response. You can and should also ask for the same courtesy when it's your turn to speak.
- **Breathing: 4-6-8 Technique**. First, breathe in and exhale through your mouth, making a whoosh sound. Next, inhale quietly through your nose for a count of 4. Hold your breath for a count of 6 then exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of 8. Repeat 5 times.
- **Walk away**. This doesn't mean *run* away or ignore the situation, this means give yourself at least 5 minutes to remove yourself from an escalating situation before it gets out of hand. If you are in an argument with someone, politely say you need X amount of time and you will promise to come back to them then.
- **The Silent Scream**. If you're in an anxious state (heart beating fast, shaking hands etc.) and you want to regain control, you need to release the adrenaline that's been building in your system. Find a private place (toilet stall usually works just fine!). Tense up all of your muscles, clench your fists and jaw, arm and leg muscles, scrunch your eyes closed, etc and scream - without sound (you can whisper your scream if you like)!
- **555**. Sit down and take a minute or two to observe your surroundings (indoors or outdoors). In your head, take note of: 5 visuals, 5 sounds, 5 feelings or sensations. Pause long enough to connect to each of the 5 visuals, sounds and feelings. Really absorb the senses and notice how the mind begins to settle in the present.
- **Ask yourself why**. Why exactly are you feeling stressed out? Have you done everything you could to help the situation? If the control of the situation is out of your hands, and you cannot do more, is there a reason for being stressed? If you need help, what specifically can someone help you with and do you know who you can ask for it?

Managing stress at work

In nearly every second of every day we are bombarded with input from our external and internal worlds. We are forced to process and multitask at an alarming rate and are often attempting to put out fire after fire. While productivity is important, equally as important is the need to give your mind proper rest to recharge, recenter, and work out thoughts and ideas. The following are simple behaviour 'hacks' to help begin to manage and control your environment and thus your relationship with stress.



At work

- **Don't start the day with email**, instead check emails at 10am and use the time before to write down your 3 core objectives for the day and the plan to implement and work on them.
- **Accept all meetings you are invited to** but only join the ones with clear objectives that you can actively contribute to. Don't shy away from asking for agenda and objectives and if you can share info via email instead, do that.
- **Do not eat lunch at your desk**, if you do it should be an EXCEPTION (max. once per week). It's important to give yourself and your mind a rest. Even if it's just a short 30mins, sit or walk with a colleague to get lunch. This is not a marathon, you can take a break!
- **When working on a project that requires deep concentration**, consider setting an out of office reply explaining that you're working on a big project and will only be checking emails at 10am and 2pm for the next X days. For anything urgent, refer them to your communication channel of choice. You may still get unnecessary messages, but at the very least people will think twice before contacting you!
- **Break it down**. A project can seem overwhelming when looked at as a whole. Breaking it down and into milestones and manageable steps make it easier to reach your goals. Use post-its to map your project milestones out on your office wall!
- **Delegate, postpone, eliminate**. Assess each task on your list by asking:
 - Is the task important to you/the business?
 - Will it relieve pressure?
 - Is it 'on strategy'?
 - Can it only be done by you?
 - Does it help you move forward?If not, check if you can delegate, postpone or eliminate the task completely. See the table on the next page to help you.
- **Remind yourself of the 'bigger picture'**. To ensure the greatest output of your energy, understand the bigger purpose of the task. It's easy to get tunnel vision and burn energy on small tasks but progress on things that do not ladder up to the bigger picture are just distractions. Always check in on how what you're about to do relates to the bigger picture.

Managing stress at home

Setting boundaries on your home or personal time is important. Work is only a part (albeit a big one) of the overall scheme of life and this is the space where you can explore and work on the *other* things that can bring great reward and satisfaction like your well-being and health, personal goals, family, interests, hobbies, etc.



At home

- **Mindfulness apps** improve your ability to remain calm under pressure. A daily 10 min practice can increase flexibility, adaptability, creativity, and focus. Suggested apps: Headspace & Calm
- **Decide what time you officially go offline** and switch off ALL phone/messaging notifications on your phone. You should also let your colleagues know that after X time they should not expect a response. If you still get messages, ignore them, you need to protect this mental space for yourself.
- **Do not send emails after 6pm or at the weekends.** Even if you have to work, keep your inbox set to 'offline' - sending emails might feel productive - but they could stress out others or signal that they can start emailing you. Set your boundaries and commit to them.
- **Break the screen addiction.** Yes this is an obvious one, but also one that's so easy to get drawn into when you're "bored" waiting on line at the store, waking up in the morning or winding down after (or even during!) dinner. There are several apps to help fight, limit or block social media like Offtime, Moment, Flipd, or Space to name a few. If you prefer less involved methods:
 - Use airplane mode or turn off your notifications and put your phone in another room during important moments like dinner with your family.
 - Make it harder to access your phone and apps by setting an obnoxiously long unlock passcode.
 - Set a rule at home, no phones/screens between or after the hours of X - and stick to it!
- **At minimum, don't use any form of technology at least 1 hour before sleep** - this will increase the quality of your night's rest.
- **Don't charge your phone, laptop, or tablet in your bedroom.** You may be tempted to 'quickly check' your email or get sucked into an Instagram blackhole if your phone is within easy reach. If you use your phone for an alarm - buy an old fashioned alarm clock!
- **Define your 'self-care strategy'.** Think about the following categories: Basic, Emotional, Relationships, and Physical. Use the table on the following page to write down things for each that help you relax and feel 'ok' again - this will be your go-to list for making sure you're taking care of your needs. When you start to feel stressed, refer to the list to choose an activity to help lower your stress levels.

For example:

 - Basic - eating a delicious meal, drinking enough water, getting 8hrs of uninterrupted sleep
 - Emotional - Writing in my journal
 - Relationships - weekly contact with mom (even if it's just a quick text), quiet dinner with my husband
 - Physical - time in nature, walking, yoga, listening to my favorite band

Cultivating a positive mindset

Is it possible to train your brain?

Yes it is! Training your brain is not so different from training for a marathon or lifting weights. With the right methods, commitment, and consistency, you can actually train your brain to think positively. Make no mistake, it's not about ignoring negative things, but rather not being held hostage by them and learning to prioritise and see the opportunity in them instead.

Research on neuroplasticity—the ability of the brain to change even in adulthood—reveals that as you develop new habits, you are effectively 'rewiring' the brain. So engaging in one brief positive exercise every day for as little as three weeks can actually have a lasting impact on you!

Below are examples of just a few quick positive things to easily work into your daily routine. After doing any of these for just 21 days, you'll start to notice a shift in your overall mindset*.



1 Expressing appreciation

Send a positive message to someone – this could be a friend, colleague, family member, anyone you appreciate, even the stranger who helped you on the way to work this morning! Verbally, email, text message, phone call, whatever way you prefer as long as it gets to them quickly. They will feel great to receive your message, and you will feel great for giving it!

2 Personal gratitude

At the end of each day, on your way home from work, before going to sleep, or even in the shower, reflect on the day while it's still fresh in your head and write down 3 things that happened that you're grateful for (big or small!). Each day challenge yourself to identify a new set of 3 things.

3 Finding meaning

Set a timer and take 5 minutes to write down the most meaningful experience of the past 24 hours. Use the entire 5 minutes to answer the following:

- Why it was important?
- What did it make you feel?
- What learnings can you take for yourself moving forward?

Even if you think you have nothing more to say, challenge yourself to fill the 5 minutes.

4 Mindful breathing

This exercise, with regular practise, can help train your mind to focus and resist distractions over long periods of time.

- Find a quiet place and set an alarm for 3 minutes
- Close your eyes and focus on your breath for a count of 10
- Once you get to 10, count back to 1 then start counting up again to 10
- Every time you notice your mind has wandered simply bring it back to counting your breaths
- Repeat this until the alarm goes off

*In research conducted with KPMG, Shawn Achor proved that doing just 1 of these exercises a day for 21 days shifted people's optimism levels significantly when compared with a control group where no exercises were done.



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