

3 Mindfulness Keys to Turn Stress to Your Advantage

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Mind



When we think of the word “stress,” it is often in the negative: the epidemic of stress and anxiety, the physical symptoms of chronic stress, etc. But stress can be positive depending on how we respond to it, says mindfulness and leadership expert Laurie J. Cameron. Author of the upcoming National Geographic book “The Mindful Day: Practical Ways to Find Focus, Calm, and Joy From Morning to Evening” , Laurie shares:

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The body’s response to stress – rapid heartbeat and breathing, narrowed vision, and a jolt of adrenaline – is an evolutionary adaptation designed to mobilize us to action.

“When you have a client deadline, an exam the next day, or a ski race to win, this physiological response can give you the energy and focus to excel,” Laurie says. “Unfortunately, much of the time the patterns in our mind impact how we interpret the events in our lives. We assign meaning to deadlines, exams, and other people’s behaviors that tank our ability to perform.”

Because you are built for survival, your brain’s own alarm system is scanning for threats and triggering the “fight-flight-freeze” stress response to escape what you interpret as a danger. *“Sometimes the dangers are real – but these days we get triggered throughout the day by a comment, a surprise decision, an angry text, and also by the way we relate to our responsibilities and to the people around us,”* Laurie describes. *“As a human, your neurobiology is designed to react quickly rather than to thoughtfully respond; to feel stress rather than balance; and to hear your inner critic rather than positive, encouraging words of possibility.”*

Here are three ways to increase your mastery in responding to stress:

1. Shift how you interpret your body’s signals: How we interpret the events in our lives has a lot to do with how

stressful we feel. What if we interpreted the body's signals as giving us energy, power, and drive to succeed? The next time you feel stress coming on, consider that those feelings are mobilizing you for action.

2. Choose a different perspective: Our mindsets drive how we interpret stress. As we become more mindful, we are able to witness our thoughts and see when we are creating a internal self-talk that fuels a negative narrative. Choosing to see stressful events as temporary, seeing yourself as empowered to take action versus a victim of circumstance, and seeing events as opportunities to grow all increase our resilience.

3. Train with the Body Scan meditation: A core mindfulness meditation practice from Laurie's upcoming book is the Body Scan. Sit quietly and systematically direct attention from one body part to the next, starting at the top of the head and moving to the feet (or vice versa). This strengthens the insula, the part of the brain associated with our capacity for interception (a lesser-known sense that helps us understand and feel what's going on inside our body). This capacity is at the heart of being aware, empathetic, and emotionally agile. As we learn to shift the body's response to stress, we open up space for self-compassion and skillful action for ourselves and others.

“As we get better at becoming more conscious in our daily lives, we can see with greater awareness our thoughts (what am I believing about this situation) and our body sensations (what is my body telling me right now),” Laurie says. “When we do this, we can create space to calm the mind and body and be more skillful in the very full and sometimes intense lives we lead.”

About Laurie J. Cameron:

Mindful leadership expert Laurie J. Cameron is the author of “The Mindful Day: Practical Ways to Find Focus, Calm, and Joy From Morning to Evening ” (2018). Laurie is founder and CEO of PurposeBlue (<http://purposeblue.com>), an organization that brings evidence-based mindful leadership programs to companies, change makers, universities, and federal agencies.