

# Stress is the enemy of creativity – so here's how to beat it

**D**ID you listen to the recent webinar with Paul Scully, Minister for Small Business, and Gary Turner, MD and joint co-founder of Xero, on how businesses can survive and thrive?

The most interesting and insightful comment for me came from Gary Turner. He said, 'within every business there is another business'. I took this to mean that within the business owner's experience and his intellectual property, there is the seed of another business waiting to germinate.

This chimes with a quote from a US motivational speaker, 'there is never a money shortage, only an ideas shortage'.

And yet, when we feel flat, deflated and overburdened is the very time we need to be innovative, creative and inspired. When the future looks bleak and challenging, sometimes the obstacles seem unsurmountable. What has this to do with stress?

## Stress is the enemy of creativity.

Ironically, the very internal self-defence mechanism, our body control system, which brought us to the 21st century, is now working against us. The fight/flight/freeze reaction which kept us safe from physical threats did so by blocking the sophisticated, clever bit of the brain. This vitally important part of the brain enables:

- fine perception
- differentiation of thoughts and feelings
- discrimination of appropriate behaviour
- self-reflection, self-awareness
- problem-resolution
- goal satisfaction.



Fight/flight/freeze also creates a state of high alert. If this goes on for too long, the changes in our body chemistry means we can't switch off easily. This impacts sleep and recovery which in turn produces more stress and can create a vicious cycle, including brain-fog, poor focus, reduced memory and altered attitudes and moods.

The body is amazing and, historically, could keep going until 'danger' passed

but today it is different. We don't know when Covid and this situation is going to stop which makes the fear of the virus itself more stressful. This impacts the running of a company increasing other fears: financial worries, family health concerns, staff wellbeing and the viability of current strategies, procedures and practice.

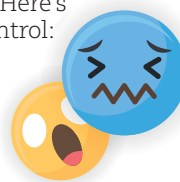
However, the biggest accumulating problem I see as a stress resilience trainer is the unknown and long-term impact of the 'ever-moving goal-posts'.

Uncertainty is one of the most subtle, unsettling and anxiety-producing factors to contribute to stress. We like patterns. We like predictability. We like to plan. These give us a routine, a sense of control, but today much of the familiar has disappeared.

I focus on teaching techniques with teams and key personnel to build personal control and self-empowerment. This creates vitality, energy and wellbeing. With this comes different renewing and supporting chemicals which run the body. The cascade effect brings feelings of ease and optimism. The brain functions more optimally.

Normal, in terms of the workplace, procedures and behaviours, may have gone but feeling normal is the key. Here's how to reduce stress and return control:

- be prepared to be more open, flexible and adaptable.
- examine your skill set, abilities, and business scope
- look for new ways of approaching the current situation.
- check your mindset and guard your attitude
- switch off from social media, news, depressing endless debates or opinions which are meaningless until action takes place – you will hear soon enough if change is to happen. Opinions are the most common commodity on earth
- spend more time looking at how to help your client-base and your staff
- take your mind off your own problems by looking to see how you can help others resolve theirs
- cut out distractions when you are working on a project or online. Each distraction takes 1.5 minutes



Paula Ruane, based just outside Colchester, is one of the region's leading practitioners in stress and resilience training. Here she offers some invaluable advice to help us all get through a very stressful period in our working – and personal – lives.

for you to return to the same level of concentration - a 30-minute project with 20 pings, bleeps, alerts and interruptions from others will take an hour

- cut out blue screens for at least one hour, two hours better, before bed. No phones, gadgets or gizmos in the bedroom
- Establish your energy-building routine:
  - gained Covid calories? Share this with your employees and ask them for advice on healthier options. Ask for feedback: people like to feel useful
  - less time travelling means possible time for improved selfcare so diarise times
  - walk each day. It's raining, wear waterproofs
  - build in 15 minutes between each online meeting. Stand up and walk in a small figure-of-eight of approximately two metres. This will loosen the spine and hips to release a lot of the stress-induced chemicals which cause back-ache and tension
  - drink more water
  - give yourself a break in all senses. Accept that you are doing the best you can under the circumstances, show yourself a little kindness and do the same to others. If you are stressed and worried and have employees, imagine how they might feel.
- finally, don't be afraid to ask for help – you are not alone

Set up a mastermind group of peers to discuss your situations and concerns and ask them to do the same. Very often, creativity, solutions and different approaches will surface during or following these. Feeling supported and heard also boosts the renewing chemicals in the body for improved feel-good factor.