

# **THE STRESS POCKETBOOK**

*2nd Edition*

By Mary Richards

*Drawings by Phil Hailstone*

“Excellent. To the point. Practical. A vital tool for everyone who wants to reduce their stress at work.”

**Adam Allen, Principal Engineer, Railways, Scott Wilson Group plc**

“This is a little gem, brimming full of insights and practical tips for recognising, controlling and relieving stress. With stress reaching epidemic levels in our modern world, we can all benefit from this book’s guidance and direction.”

**Dr. Alison Salt, Consultant Paediatrician,  
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, London**

# CONTENTS



## INTRODUCTION

5

Pressure: why it occurs, how it can be positive and why it can lead to stress unless properly managed



## STRESS

13

Defining stress, how the body responds, sources of stress and its signs



## YOUR THOUGHTS

23

How your thinking and thus your perspective can influence stress, and how to control it in order to reduce pressure



## YOUR RESPONSES

41

How we respond to pressure influences our stress levels; tips for controlling your responses to time, workload, change, people, conflict and yourself



## YOUR LIFESTYLE

67

Your lifestyle can limit or increase stress; tips for staying fit, healthy and relaxed, planning a balanced life and getting help and support when required



## GETTING RESULTS

93

To get results you need to recognise stress, know how to apply first aid (mental and physical) and aim to prevent rather than cure



## STRESS IN YOUR ORGANISATION

113

How to ensure you're not a source of pressure at work, how to help others and how to encourage a low stress culture

## YOUR RESPONSES

# YOUR RESPONSE, YOUR STRESS, YOUR CHOICE



Realising that stress comes from your thoughts and responses can be quite sobering. However, it can also be liberating:

- You can choose your thoughts and responses; you may be influenced, but ultimately the choice is yours
- You can control your thoughts and responses; it may take effort, time and even practice, but they are yours to control

Exercise this choice. Take control. Reduce your stress.

## YOUR RESPONSES

# RESPONDING TO PRESSURE



Responses to pressure vary from person to person and from pressure to pressure. They may depend on what else is actually happening at the time or how you're feeling.

Amongst others, your response may be:

**Physical** – ‘butterflies’ in your stomach, headaches, shallow breathing...

**Mental** – forgetfulness, lack of concentration, worry...

**Emotional** – quarrelsome, defensive, embarrassed...

**Behavioural** – too busy for anything other than working, drinking/smoking more than usual, insomnia...

How do **you** respond to the pressures at work? Use some of the ideas on the following pages to help control your responses to the pressures of time, workload, change, people, conflict and you.

## YOUR RESPONSES

### PRESSURE OF TIME



Time is one of the greatest pressures at work.  
How do you respond to it?

- Not enough time (*panic*)
- Wasted time (*annoyance; guilt*)
- Interrupted time (*frustration; impatience*)
- Not giving enough time (*concern; worry*)
- Not being on time (*anxiety*)
- Too much time (*boredom*)

These responses are all signs of stress.  
You may experience them many times  
in each day.



## YOUR RESPONSES

# PRESSURE OF TIME

## MAKING IT WORSE



You will always be under a certain amount of pressure from time because it's a limited resource. But do you make the pressure worse than it need be? Do you:

- Always stop what you're doing to help others?
- Open the post or your e-mail as soon as it arrives?
- Work to unrealistic deadlines?
- Spend a disproportionate amount of time dotting the i's and crossing the t's?
- Watch the clock?
- Write and rewrite lengthy 'To Do' lists?
- Under-estimate the time you need?
- Work through the day without any breaks?
- Busy yourself with the tasks that interest or flatter you?
- Arrive late for meetings?
- Spend most of your day dealing with phone calls and other interruptions?
- Allow one delay at the beginning of your day to snowball into your whole schedule so that you end up chasing your tail?

Doing any of these things will increase the pressure you're under.

## YOUR RESPONSES

# PRESSURE OF TIME

## WAYS TO REDUCE THE PRESSURE



Try reducing the pressure you're under by:

- Applying the Pareto principle to your list of tasks (20% of the tasks will give you 80% of your results); identify those key tasks and make them a priority
- Distinguishing between urgent tasks (crisis, unplanned, demands, etc) and important tasks (that achieve your prime objectives, give you maximum return for effort)
- Being selective; not all tasks need 'polishing'



## YOUR RESPONSES

### **PRESSURE OF TIME**



#### WAYS TO REDUCE THE PRESSURE (Cont'd)

- Planning uninterrupted time; divert your phone; make it known that you are unavailable
- Saying 'no' to 'urgent' requests, interruptions and unreasonable demands
- Planning to do the most demanding tasks when you're at your best
- Setting realistic deadlines for tasks and sticking to them; when necessary, re-negotiate deadlines as soon as possible
- Working together; if you have the authority, delegate; alternatively, think about asking others for help; who would do your job if you were away?



## YOUR RESPONSES

# PRESSURE OF WORK



When you've got too much or too little to do at work do you:

- Blame others?
- Complain, gripe or groan?
- Work every hour available or do nothing?
- Worry that you'll lose your job?

Negative thoughts and responses will only add to your pressure. They will take you down the spiral of stress. Try to stop them. Replace them with more constructive thoughts and responses.



## YOUR RESPONSES

# PRESSURE OF WORK

## CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSES



When you've got too much work, stop. Establish the real reason for your excessive workload. Maybe you need to:

- Plan ahead for known increases in workload (end of month duties; seasonal peaks; people on leave; etc)
- Start delegating or delegate more effectively
- Work more efficiently – renegotiate deadlines; only attend relevant meetings
- Balance your tasks – mix those you like with those you don't like; the long with the short; the difficult with the easy
- Focus on one task at a time
- Be more proactive rather than reactive
- Arrange to work off-site or from home if appropriate
- Talk to someone to get a different perspective and new ideas about how to manage your workload
- Stop worrying and start doing
- Put the tips on pages 46 and 47 into practice

## YOUR RESPONSES

# WHEN THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TO DO



Try to:

- Look for ways to contribute. Who is rushed off their feet? How could you help them? Offer to do tasks that are well within your grasp – phone screening, photocopying, fetching and delivering. Helping out just once normally leads to work coming your way a second time
- Set yourself deadlines, goals and challenges to give yourself enough pressure to get moving. Perhaps you can do a task with greater accuracy than before
- Generate ideas on how to increase your workload by talking to others
- Check your job specification. Are you doing everything you're supposed to do? Discuss it with your boss



## YOUR RESPONSES

# RESPONDING TO CHANGE



When faced with change you will go through the following process:

- **Awareness** How will this affect me?
- **Shock** They're going to do what? I can't believe it
- **Denial** There's no way this'll work. It'll blow over
- **Frustration** If it wasn't for the management...
- **Realisation** If that's what's going to happen then...
- **Acceptance** If you can't beat them, join them
- **Adaptation** It could be worse. At least it means that...
- **Integration** The change becomes the norm. There's nothing to react to

Regardless of the change, be it positive or negative, you will go through all of these stages. However, the speed at which you go through them will vary from change to change and from person to person.

## YOUR RESPONSES

# RESPONDING TO CHANGE

## REDUCING THE PRESSURE



All stages of the change process are likely to put you under pressure, but some more than others. To reduce the pressure try:

- Asking questions – seek as much information as possible; you may be rejecting the change before you understand the full story
- Being as open-minded as possible – for every negative you identify, find a positive
- Moving with the change as quickly as possible – while it is important to question change and not ‘blindly’ accept it, the quicker you move with rather than against it, the sooner pressure will be reduced
- Sharing your concerns with others – being alone with change will increase the pressure you’re under; talking with others will help you see things from different perspectives

## YOUR RESPONSES

### INTRODUCING CHANGE



When you introduce change to others, reduce the pressure they're under by:

- Giving them time to come to terms with the thought of change; avoid surprises
- Where possible, introducing the change as an idea, a topic for discussion rather than a fait accompli
- Involving them as much as possible at all stages of the change; if they are involved, they will own it and be more positive about the change
- Talking to them about how they feel; when people have a voice it gives them a sense of control, reducing the pressure they're under
- Giving them as much information as possible; stress is often caused by people drawing their own conclusions through lack of information

## YOUR RESPONSES

### RESPONDING TO PEOPLE



- The customer is always right
- Seniors must be heeded
- Colleagues must be co-operated with

Responding to people at work can put you under pressure. Try not to let your behaviour make it any worse. Aggressive (fight) and submissive (flight) behaviour will both increase the pressure.

Use assertive behaviour instead. Learn to:

- Say 'no' to unreasonable requests and demands
- Reduce the pressure of conflict



## YOUR RESPONSES



# RESPONDING TO PEOPLE

## SAYING 'YES' WHEN YOU MEAN 'NO'

When...

- Everyone wants everything done yesterday
- Your day is just one interruption after another
- You feel that you're always 'fire-fighting'
- Your tasks remain untouched, while you deal with tasks for others

...you need to be proactive and say 'no'.

If you find it difficult to say 'no' try the **ADO** technique:

- A**cknowledge show that you understand the request: 'So you want me to put the figures into a table that you can use in your presentation tomorrow?'
- D**ecline with a reason, but you don't have to explain yourself: 'I can do it, but not right now...'
- O**ffer an alternative: 'I can do it first thing tomorrow morning.'



## About the Author

**Mary Richards** wrote the first edition of this book when she was a business consultant and trainer, with a background in education, international marketing and general management. Mary now combines her writing with her work as a therapist. This second edition has been written in the light of her interest in the links between the mind, the emotions, the body's structure and energy systems – and many more life experiences!

She is the author of 'The Telephone Skills Pocketbook' in this same series.



To reach Mary Richards, please contact the publisher in the first instance.