

"A Must-Read For All College Students!"
The Real Truth About Stress That Can Change Your Life

COLLEGE STRESS RELIEF

WHAT EVERY STUDENT SHOULD KNOW
(AND SPREAD AROUND) ASAP!

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What Will You Gain From Reading This Book ?

NOTE: This book is NOT a substitute for professional medical or professional mental health evaluation and treatment, should you need these.

If you are in college right now, or if you'll soon be entering, this book is for you.

It also may be for your friends, your classmates, and anyone else you know who could benefit from having less stress in their life—so please feel free to copy this book and spread it around.

My name is Mort (Doc) Orman, M.D. and I have been teaching people how to eliminate stress for more than 30 years. You may have seen some of my advice about dealing with stress on my blog at www.ormanstressrelief.com. You may also have previously seen one of my books or articles about how to cope with stress.

At the time of this writing, I am 64 years old. This means I am far removed from your world today, as well as from my own college years at Duke University (1969-1973). I was there during the Viet Nam War and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I also recall having a good deal of stress during my four years at Duke as an undergraduate.

Freshman year was extremely difficult for me. It was my first time away from home and being on my own. I was sad and homesick about having to separate from my high school girlfriend. We tried to keep our relationship going, but it didn't work out.

I also found it hard to adjust to my new social environment. This improved somewhat when I joined a fraternity, but I never felt comfortable in my own skin during my entire four years in college.

There were many other stressors at Duke, as I'm sure you can imagine. But more importantly, there was very little help to assist me with my struggles. There was certainly no book like this to guide me. And while I could have benefitted from seeing a therapist, I couldn't afford one. I also didn't want another social stigma, in addition to all the other social problems I was having.

So I was completely on my own when it came to dealing with my stress. Needless to say, I wasn't very successful. Not only did my stress continue all throughout college, but it got worse once I graduated and entered medical school. As a medical student, I was anxious, tense, and irritable much of the time. I also felt depressed on occasion.

Eventually, my stress got so bad in medical school that I did go into therapy. While these weekly counseling sessions helped me to some degree, they never gave me the complete relief I was seeking from all my anger, frustration, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and interpersonal failures.

Maybe you're thinking right now, "Gee, how'd this guy ever become a world-class stress expert?" And certainly, I couldn't blame you for having this impression.

But this is my history, so I thought I'd share it with you. Also, knowing exactly what I had to go through to eventually overcome my stress may be helpful to you in your own personal journey as well

Getting back to my story (please stay with me—it won't take much longer), despite continuing in therapy for seven (7) years, including my last two years of medical school, all three years of Internal Medicine residency, and my first few years in private practice, I continued to feel extremely stressed.

Nothing I tried made any lasting difference. There was nothing I learned in college that helped me deal with my stress. There was nothing I learned in my four years of medical school, or my three years of medical residency, that made things easier for me. And as I've already explained, therapy sessions helped me somewhat, but

I never learned much about dealing with stress, per se, from my therapist (who was otherwise pretty good).

In addition, I tried all of the following coping strategies without much stress relief:

- Trying to manage my stress;
- Trying to avoid stressful situations;
- Trying to avoid difficult people;
- Reading books about how to cope with modern day stress;
- Exercising more or trying to change my diet;
- Going to seminars about stress management;
- Going to lectures by various “experts” about how to deal with stress;
- Trying to think more positively when I was emotionally upset;
- Trying to stop myself from feeling angry, frustrated, or anxious just by sheer willpower;
- Using alcohol or drugs to deal with my stress;
- Seeking advice from friends;
- Seeking advice from my fellow physicians;
- Seeking advice from relatives (certainly not my parents);
- Trying to figure out how to deal with stress on my own.

In other words, nothing helped me much at all. And perhaps you’ve also found that the same has been true for you.

If so, then you are in exactly the right place.

I Finally Discovered How To Master Stress

Eventually, I discovered the keys to eliminating most of the stress in my life, and I'll be sharing many of these with you in this book.

Now, if I thought you could just take a few psychology courses in college, or just take a course on stress management, and get this valuable information, I wouldn't need to write a book such as this. But I don't believe this is likely.

You see, I got lots of training on how to manage stress in medical school. I also got lots of input about managing my stress once I finished my training and went into private practice on my own. The insights that finally helped me the most, however, weren't taught to me in any traditional courses on stress. And they're not being taught in most colleges or other academic institutions today. That's why a "truth-telling" book like this one is so badly needed.

I assume you are at college to get a good education (not to mention to get away from your parents and to party just a little). And you also are there to get prepared to be happy and successful in life, once you graduate.

Now wouldn't you think that learning how to understand stress correctly—what it really is, what causes it to occur, and what your best coping options are for dealing with it—would be one of the primary things you should gain from your college education?

Well, I'm sorry to tell you that you probably won't. Not only will you continue to experience much more stress than you need to while in college, but once you graduate, you'll be no better prepared to deal with it than I was.

That's why the title of this book is "College Stress Relief: What Every Student Should Know (And Spread Around) ASAP. The last part means "as soon as possible."

If you are just starting out in college and you're in your freshman or sophomore years, this book can be of immense value to you. The earlier you read it, the better off you will be. But even if you are a junior or senior, it's not too late. After all, this book is not just about relieving stress in college—it's about how to reduce stress all throughout your life!

This Book Will Challenge You

I want to be clear with you right from the start...this book will challenge you. It will force you to question some of your deeply held beliefs about stress (and about life). It's not going to give you simplistic steps you can follow to magically make all your stress suddenly disappear. That's not how things work.

This book is also not going to give you short little tips about how to manage your stress, like: get clear about your priorities, make to-do lists, or set aside 15 minutes twice a day to meditate.

Not only will these strategies not make a huge difference in how much stress you experience, but one of the things you will learn from this book is that giving people tips, as well as encouraging them to manage their stress, are both counterproductive.

In order for you to achieve true breakthroughs in your ability to deal with stress, both in college and for the rest of your life, you'll need to make significant changes in the whole way you think about and understand human stress. You'll need to take a very deep (and honest) look at some of the assumptions you already have, and some of the specific beliefs that you (and most of your friends) share.

You see, the real problem with stress today is not that you or I lack the ability to deal with our stress effectively. The real problem today is that we live in a society where stress is mostly misunderstood. We live in a world where myths and misconceptions about stress rule the day, and where many popular, but false, ideas keep us from accessing our natural abilities to live stress free, and to be as happy, confident, and successful as we could be.

One of the main purposes of this book is to correct these false beliefs about stress, and introduce you to better ways of thinking about this common human problem. It will help you build a new foundation for understanding human stress that will benefit you, both now and for many years to come.

I wish someone had shared this wisdom contained in this book with me when I was in college in my early 20's. I can't tell you how much pain, suffering, relationship failures, and other emotional distress I could have avoided.

I didn't discover most of the truths I'm going to share with you in this book until I was in my early 30s. But when I did, boy did they make a huge and lasting difference.

For the past 30 years, despite having many more professional and personal responsibilities than ever before, I've had very little stress or tension to speak of. I rarely get angry, frustrated, or anxious anymore. And even when I do, I know how to make these emotions quickly disappear whenever I want.

I've been happily married to my wife, Christina, for 28 years, and we have a wonderful daughter who just graduated from college.

I've also written several popular books about stress, including *The 14 Day Stress Cure*, which won a non-fiction book of the year award from the National Association of Independent Publishers (1992).

I've also been the official sponsor of **National Stress Awareness Month** (April) in the U.S., every year since 1992. And I've conducted seminars and workshops about stress for thousands of individuals, including doctors, nurses, medical students, college students, college athletic coaches, psychologists, business executives, the clergy, and even the F.B.I.

So, I'm not some "chump" off the street, who's read a few books and now thinks he's a new-age expert on human stress. I've been actively working in this field for the past 30 years, and I've gained special knowledge and skills about dealing with stress that very few experts today even know about, much less possess.

I wrote this book for you, and for all other students in college today, so you could have a way to benefit from much of the knowledge I've gained about overcoming stress during these past three decades. I am making it available to you and all other registered college students for free, so you can have an easy way to share this critically important knowledge with your friends and classmates.

Another reason I wrote this book is because I strongly believe that this type of stress education should be part of every student's undergraduate training.

Hopefully, if enough college students like you start benefitting from this type of stress education, some college administrators and faculty may eventually start teaching it themselves.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into **four main sections**:

Section 1: This first section teaches you how to recognize the 9 biggest myths (i.e. lies) about stress that are keeping you from dealing with stress more successfully. In this first section, I will also introduce you to some very new ways of thinking about stress that will allow you to overcome each of these myths and understand stress correctly. It may take you a little while to get used to some of these new ideas, but once you do, I'm sure you'll be very grateful.

Section 2: This section explains why managing stress is not your best coping option. It also will introduce you to a powerful three-step coping method I call "The Ultimate Method For Dealing With Stress," which I have found to be far superior to stress management.

Section 3: This is by far the longest and most detailed section of the book, and it will introduce you to a whole new way of thinking about the **causes of human stress**. As you learn more and more about how to identify the real causes of stress in your life, many of which are hidden from your view, you'll be able to start applying this knowledge immediately to whatever college stress you might be experiencing. You'll also be able to keep benefiting from, and adding to, this new perspective long after you graduate.

At the end of this section, I'm also going to show you a great way to make use of the general principles you just learned to better understand the **causes of human anger**. I'll also give you a simple but very powerful tool for always remembering these causes, whenever you feel angry about anything.

Section 4: In this final section of the book, I give you some suggestions for how you can learn to win against stress, both in college and all throughout the rest of your adult lifetime.

Are You On Board?

Hopefully, this very brief summary has given you enough of a glimpse into what this book is about, and how it can benefit you, so you'll want to take time from your busy academic and/or social schedule to read it.

They say college students' attention spans are short today, and it's unlikely they will sit down and thoroughly read through a book such as this. Well, I don't agree. I think that college students' attention spans may be short today because there's so much worthless crap being thrown at them, that it doesn't make sense to pay close attention to it. However, when something truly valuable does come along, I believe most college students will give it the attention it rightfully deserves.

And if you do read this entire book, and you do find it rewarding, please be sure to pass it on to others. You are free to copy it, email it around, post it on your own personal website, talk about it on Facebook, talk about it on Tumblr, or otherwise find ways to share it and discuss it with your friends and other classmates.

Wishing you much future happiness, good health, and success,

Mort (Doc) Orman, M.D.

Section 1—The 9 Big Myths About Stress That Are Keeping You Stuck

In this first section, I'm going to introduce you to a whole new way of thinking about stress that can make you much better able to deal with it—both in college and for the rest of your life.

There are 9 big myths about stress today that are keeping you trapped in an outdated mentality (the “stress management mentality”) and are keeping you from discovering how to deal with your stress more successfully. I'm going to debunk each of these myths, one by one in this section, in order to build you a whole new foundation for understanding what stress really is, where it really comes from, and what your best options are for coping with it.

Be prepared to have some of your most cherished beliefs about stress become shattered in the next few pages. Also, if you truly grasp the beauty (and wisdom) of this new understanding, you will never want to go back to your old way of thinking. So take one last romantic look at your current beliefs about stress, and kiss them goodbye.

You're about to get a real education in understanding human stress that few people have today. I can assure you that your parents don't have this understanding, nor do most of your college professors. I've been teaching these principles (and using them successfully in my own life) for the past 30 years. And it's amazing how many well-educated college graduates are walking around today with almost zero appreciation for them. But the ones who do grasp this new understanding are much better able to cope with their stress than they were before.

NOTE: Remember how I warned you this book was going to challenge you? Well, this starts right now, with the very first myth I'm going to address. Now, you might not immediately agree with what I'm about to tell you, but that's alright. Just hang in there, and as you keep reading on in this book, everything will make sense to you eventually. And when it does, you'll be living in a whole new world of possibilities for eliminating stress that may not be open to you right now.

STRESS MYTH #1: Stress Is Something That Actually Exists

If you've read anything at all about stress (books, magazine articles, newspaper stories, etc.), you've no doubt discovered that most conventional stress experts take two things for granted, right from the start. The two things they all take for granted are:

- 1) stress is something that actually exists, and
- 2) stress is something that human beings often suffer from.

These two points seem pretty reasonable, right? I mean who would argue with either of them?

What if I told you, however, that neither of these widely held beliefs about stress is true? I assume you probably won't believe me. But I'm about to show you that both are entirely false.

I too used to believe in both of these common sense notions about stress. However, I eventually discovered there are better ways to think about stress—that most people don't know about today.

Let's focus on the first of the two popular beliefs mentioned above. What is stress really, and is it truly something that actually exists?

What Is Stress Really?

Whenever I conduct a seminar or workshop about stress, I start off by asking participants to share their thoughts about what stress is. I go around the room and ask people, one at a time, to tell me (and the other participants) what stress means to them.

I've done this several hundred times now, and the results are always the same. When you ask people to tell you what stress is, they usually give you answers like this:

- Stress is being mentally or physically overwhelmed by too many external pressures or demands;
- Stress is not being able to sleep well or concentrate during the day;
- Stress is feeling anxious, angry, frustrated or depressed;
- Others will point to physical symptoms in their bodies, such as muscle aches, headaches, indigestion, excessive perspiration, or rapid heart beats;
- And some will say stress is the inappropriate activation of the body's "flight or fight response," which results in excessive stress hormones being released into the bloodstream.

You probably have your own personal definition for stress, which may or may not be similar to the ones above.

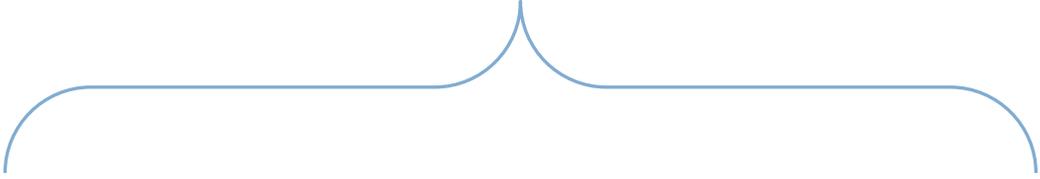
I could have listed other responses, but the important point is there are many different definitions of stress around today, and all of them do have merit.

However, none of them gets to the heart of what stress really is. None of them adequately captures its true essence.

You see, the real truth about what stress is turns out to be very different from what you, and most other people, have been told.

What Is The Real Truth About Stress?

The real truth about stress is this...



**“STRESS”
IS JUST
A
WORD**

Doc Orman, M.D.

That's right. Stress is not some "thing" or "condition" that actually exists.

The only place stress exists is in human language.

It's just a word—an abstract concept—that someone invented years ago to stand for many **other things in life that really do exist** and that really do bother us from time to time.

While this basic truth about stress may seem silly or even inane at first glance, I assure you it has profound implications. I will explore some of these implications with you later on.

Now, if you doubt that "stress" is just a word—and that's all it is—all you have to go back and look at what the inventor of the term originally said about it.

Origin Of The Term "Stress"

The term "stress" was first introduced in its modern context by Hans Selye, an Austrian-born physician, who did much of his pioneering research on stress in Montreal, Canada during the 1930s and 1940s.

In his 1956 book *The Stress of Life*, Selye clearly states:

"If we are to use this concept (stress) in a strictly scientific manner, it is important to keep in mind that stress is an abstraction; it has no independent existence." (p.43)

Selye knew quite well that he was at the forefront of a new branch of scientific research. He also understood that a new vocabulary would be needed to communicate about his research within the scientific community.

He actually borrowed the term "stress" from the field of engineering, where it had been used for many years. Engineers adopted this term to describe experiments where various non-living materials were subjected to extremes of heat, pressure, tension, weight-bearing, etc. The term "stress" was used to denote the external forces impinging upon the inanimate object, and the term "strain" was used to describe any internal disruptions that occurred within the material itself.

Selye began doing the same type of studies with laboratory animals, and later with humans. So the “stress-strain” model that engineers had long been using seemed very well-suited to the type of research he was pioneering.

But at the same time, Selye was very clear that “stress” was just an abstract concept that only existed in language. Strong wind shears, extremes of heat and cold, thousand pound weights, and blow torches are all things that really do exist in the world. And while you can use the term “stress” or “stressor” to refer to them, it is not “stress” that is real, but rather it is the specific external forces that this abstract term refers to.

So Selye tried to warn us not to make this critical mistake. But as time went on, we forgot his warning.

As a result, we’ve all been taught to believe that stress is a “thing” or a “condition” that actually does exist, and that we actually do suffer from.

I’m not saying that just because stress is just a word, that everything we experience when we say we’re feeling “stressed” is imaginary or doesn’t exist for us.

Stressful things really do happen, and we really do suffer at times. All I’m saying is that whenever we say we are suffering from “stress,” we are not. **We are actually suffering from something else.** And we need to be very clear about what that “something else” is if we ever hope to deal with our stress in a masterful way.

You see, in order to become a master at dealing with anything in life, the very first thing you must do is correctly understand the fundamental nature of whatever it is that you’re trying to conquer. You need to know exactly what it is—and exactly what it is not.

That’s why if you really want to get good at freeing yourself from stress, you must understand that there is no such “thing” as stress. Stress is just a word we use to stand for something else that truly does exist and that we truly do want relief from.

We’ll take a deeper look at what this “something else” is in just a moment.

The Body's Stress Response

Some people will object fiercely to the notion that stress is just a word. They will argue that stress is not just a word, that it's a well-documented pattern of physiological responses that occur within our bodies. They will insist it's an objectively verifiable biologic "condition" that truly does "exist."

I agree that there are indeed well-known physiological changes that occur within our bodies—called the body's **stress response** or the **flight or fight response**—and these physiologic responses really do exist.

However, this is not all that stress really is, and it's not the best way to define it.

The measurable changes that occur within our bodies are just results (or after effects) of what we mean by the word "stress"—and so they are only one part of a much larger story and are not the entire thing.

Therefore, it is just as big a mistake to define stress in purely physiological terms as it is to define it in any other limited way.

NOTE: About 40 years ago, a British observer lamented that there was so much confusion and indiscriminant use of the term "stress," even then, that it was the only thing he knew of that "in addition to being itself, can be the cause of itself, and also the result of itself." This confusion all comes from failing to appreciate that **stress is just a word**.

STRESS MYTH #2: Human Beings Often Suffer From Stress

Earlier in this section, I pointed out that most stress experts, and most ordinary people as well, take it for granted that stress is something that actually exists, and that stress is something that human beings commonly suffer from.

We've already seen that "stress" is just an abstract concept that doesn't really exist (except in human language). Now, I'm going to show you that human beings never, ever suffer from stress.

Stress Is A Word That Stands For Something Else

When I suggest you consider that "stress is just a word," I am not asking you to reject the notion that human beings (including you) frequently suffer in their lives.

All I'm saying is that whenever you think you are "suffering from stress," you are not. You are really suffering from something else. And that something else can take many forms.

For example, when we say we are **suffering from stress**, we often mean:

- We are suffering from anxiety.
- We are feeling frustrated or angry.
- We are excessively tired or feeling overwhelmed.
- We have tense muscles in our body.
- We just lost something important to us.
- We just lost someone dear to us.

These are all actual things that do happen or really do exist. They are not just words (although we still need to use words to describe them). Rather they are very specific emotions, body sensations, external events, tragedies, losses, etc. that do happen and that do exist.

Stress” Is A Word That Stands For...

You see, the real truth about “stress” is that it is just a word we use to stand for many different **problems** in our lives.

We use the word “**stress**” to stand for:

- Emotional problems
- Physical problems
- Financial problems
- School problems
- Work problems
- Interpersonal problems
- Self-esteem problems
- And hundreds and hundreds of other problems, as well.

Therefore, whenever we say we are “suffering from stress”—we are not. What we are suffering from instead are very real **problems** in our life.

And, these problems are not just words...they really do exist.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

Stress is a word that stands for problems in our lives.

Is There Really Such A Thing As “College Stress”?

Think about the term “college stress” for just a moment. What are you really suffering from when you say you’re having college-related stress?

What are the specific problem or problems you are actually struggling with?

Well, it could be many things, and it could mean different things for different college students:

- Feeling exhausted
- Not getting proper sleep
- Having loud or obnoxious roommates
- Being worried about failing out
- Uncertainty about your choice of major or career
- Uncertainty about getting a job, once you graduate
- Trouble adjusting to being on your own
- Fear of growing up
- Fear of assuming adult responsibilities
- Overeating or overusing alcohol, drugs, stimulants, etc.
- Social difficulties and/or anxieties
- Being bullied or otherwise made fun of
- Having low self-esteem or low self-confidence
- Getting angry or irritated more than you should
- Feeling depressed, lost, or hopeless
- Possibly even having thoughts of suicide
- Resenting your parents
- Having conflicts with teachers or administrators
- Being around individuals you hate, or who hate you
- Not liking your appearance
- Thinking you’re not smart enough
- Thinking you’re not worthy of being loved
- And on, and on, and on.....

Now, you might be thinking there's no big difference whether you say you are suffering from stress, or you say you are suffering from problems.

You might think this is just a trivial semantic point.

Well, it's NOT a trivial point at all.

It can make all the difference in whether you're able to deal with "stress" successfully in your life, or not. I'll have more to say about this in just a moment.

What's most important to understand right now is that if you truly want to become a master at relieving stress in your life, you must be clear that "stress" is just a word, and that human beings never, ever suffer from stress.

What we do suffer from is very real--and very specific--problems in our lives. And it is these specific problems (not "stress") that we actually want relief from, not some mythical, non-existing entity call "stress" that no human being can deal with.

How We Benefit From Knowing "Stress" is Just a Word

Knowing that "stress" is just a word can make a HUGE difference in your ability to cope with stress successfully.

Here are just some of the benefits we gain from remembering stress is just a word:

Benefits

1. You'll stop making the mistake of thinking your problem is **stress**.
2. You'll start focusing instead on **the real problems** that are bothering you. This will force you to define your problems more specifically.
3. Instead of asking "How can I deal with my stress?" you'll begin to ask more focused, **problem-specific questions**.

4. Your answers to these focused, problem-specific questions will be much **more useful** in helping you deal with your “stress.”

Problem-Focused Questions

Look at the difference between asking yourself “How can I deal with my stress?” and asking yourself the following types of problem-focused questions:

1. I seem to be getting **angry** all the time. I wonder how I can learn to better understand and deal with my anger?
2. I seem to be **worrying** quite a lot. I wonder how I can learn to deal with worry?
3. I seem to be having recurring **academic problems**. I wonder what’s not working with the way I’m thinking or studying?
4. I seem to be having little success in my **social relationships**. I wonder what’s going on? And how can I improve my ability in this area?
5. I’m feeling **anxious** all the time, my **heart keeps racing**, I feel **sweaty**, **nervous** and **tense** much of the time. How can I better understand and deal with each of these emotional and/or physical problems?

The benefit of asking these more focused questions is they are much more targeted on the real problems you might be struggling with.

Asking “How can I deal with my stress?” on the other hand, immediately puts you at a **big disadvantage**. So this is clearly not just a meaningless play on words.

STRESS MYTH #3: The Best Way To Deal With Stress Is To Manage It

A third thing stress experts do, once they indoctrinate you into the first two myths that stress exists and that you really can suffer from it, is they go on to tell you about all the bad things that can happen from high levels of stress, so you'll be motivated to learn how to manage it.

This is another big myth that has most of the world totally bamboozled today. There's no truth to the notion that managing stress is our best coping option. In fact, there are significant negatives to managing stress, but you won't hear about these unless you happen to stumble upon a book like this.

What's Wrong With Managing Stress?

There are many positive, health-enhancing benefits you can gain from stress management techniques, such as yoga, meditation, relaxation, etc. They are certainly much safer than turning to cigarettes, alcohol, food, illegal drugs, or other chemical substances to cope with your "stress."

The positive benefits of managing stress are very well-known and have been widely publicized. Unfortunately, most experts never talk about the disadvantages of managing stress.

Disadvantages of Stress Management

There are so many disadvantages of managing stress that I've devoted the entire next section (Section 2) of this book to discussing the ten most important ones. There's one big disadvantage, however, that I will mention right now, because it's so important to understand.

Despite all the good things stress management can do for you, it's an approach that mainly addresses just the symptoms of your problems. Stress management rarely helps you identify and deal with the underlying causes of your day-to-day difficulties. I'll have much more to say about this critically important drawback of managing stress in Section 2. Right now, let's move on to Myth #4.

STRESS MYTH #4: Some Stress Is “Good” Or “Healthy” For Us

There is also no truth to the widespread belief that some degree of stress may be “good” or “healthy” for you. This is another price we pay for failing to recognize that stress is just a word. Since stress is just a word, we are free to apply it to anything we want, whether it applies or not.

We can also make up new terms, such as “good stress” and “bad stress,” just as we can use words to make up other mythical entities like Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy.

There’s No Such Thing as Good or Healthy Stress

One of the harmful consequences of forgetting that stress is just a word, and that this word has come to be used very indiscriminately, is that we can end up believing that we have to put up with certain problems in our lives, because some “expert” may have convinced us that some stress is “good” or “healthy” for us.

Many stress experts unfortunately promote the idea that there are two types of stress: "good stress" and “bad stress.”

For example, you could say that happy or joyous moments, like going to an exciting sporting event or to a stimulating horror movie, are examples of “good” or “healthy” stress.

While we are certainly free to do this, in all of the 23 years I practiced internal medicine, I never once had a patient walk into my office and say “Doc, I got real excited at the football game on Sunday. Is there anything you can do to help me with this?”

Don't Fall Prey To The Good Stress Myth

The problem with believing in the myth of “good” or “healthy” stress is that you can easily be misled into thinking that:

- some degree of **anxiety** must be good or healthy for you.
- a modest amount of **anger** or **frustration** might be good for you.
- stress might be necessary for you to be maximally **productive** in school or at your job.

Don't fall prey to this very common trap. None of these mistaken notions about stress are really true!

The medical, psychological, and business productivity literature supports the opposite conclusion—that the less stress you have, the healthier, happier, and more productive you will be.

STRESS MYTH #5: We Easily Recognize The Most Important Causes Of Our Stress

Another area where we have many false beliefs about stress is incorrectly understanding what's really causing our stress to occur. The main reason is that we've all been trained, by our society, to focus only on some causes—and ignore all the others.

We Tend To Focus Mainly On Obvious Causes

If you ask people what they think is causing their stress to occur, you will usually get answers like these:

- Traffic jams
- Having tight deadlines to meet
- Having too many duties or responsibilities to fulfill
- Dealing with difficult people
- Conflicts with parents or relatives
- Losing something or someone important
- Dealing with illness or injury in yourself
- Dealing with illness or injury in a loved one
- Financial pressures
- Being let down or betrayed by friends or family members

While this way of thinking about stress is commonplace, it's not correct. Most stress we experience is caused by a combination of two types of causes:

- 1) Obvious causes
- 2) Non-obvious causes.

Non-Obvious (i.e. Hidden) Causes

Obvious causes, like those listed above, are ones almost everyone easily notices. They are usually **external** to us, and they make it appear that our stress is caused entirely by “outside” forces or circumstances.

Non-obvious causes, on the other hand, are **internal** causes of stress in our lives. They consist of certain thoughts, judgments, interpretations, assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, philosophies, behaviors, and other factors—**within us**—that are typically hidden from our view.

These **internal causes** are just as important (sometimes even more so) than the obvious external situations we often find ourselves in—and that we tend to blame (exclusively) for causing our stress to occur.

Even stress associated with rather mundane problems, like traffic jams or finding out that a homework assignment was changed at the very last moment, are always caused by a **combination of internal and external factors**.

And even the most horrible external events, like floods, earthquakes, fires, and other major disasters are often made worse (i.e. more stressful than they need to be) by internal factors that some people are better able to recognize and defend against than others.

The Key To Stress Mastery

The best way to achieve stress mastery (i.e., very high levels of stress relief) in your life is to become expert at recognizing and dealing with **internal causes** of your day-to-day difficulties. You’ll never be able to achieve high levels of stress relief by trying to control just your external circumstances alone.

People who know how to pinpoint (and deal with) the hidden, internal causes of their stress have much less stress and tension in their lives than people who don’t.

And while stress mastery skills may not be prevalent today, more and more people, including some college students, are now beginning to acquire them. I’ll have much more to say about these hidden, internal causes of stress in Section 3 of this book.

STRESS MYTH #6: There Are Only Three Ways To Deal With Strong Feelings Of Anger

There is also a great deal of misunderstanding today about what we can do about our strong negative emotions, such as anger, fear, embarrassment, loneliness, etc.

Express Anger? Suppress It? Or Manage It?

Most people, for example, believe there are only three ways to deal with strong feelings of anger.

One way is to express them. This usually means “venting your spleen,” which usually takes the form of not very calmly (or respectfully) communicating your anger to the person or person’s you are upset with, or alternatively hitting the closest thing near you. You could also express your angry feelings simply by sending a nasty email or text message, or if you are really old-fashioned, you could sit down and write out a lengthy letter.

The second option is to try to ignore, deny, medicate, or simply stew over your angry feelings, without communicating them to anyone. Sometimes this coping strategy leads to harmful extremes, such as drug abuse, alcoholism, serious overeating, or to other unpleasant self-destructive behaviors. It can even lead to certain types of health problems.

In recent years, a third popular option has emerged. This is to use stress management techniques to help reduce or release any pent up anger or hostility you might be feeling. While anger management strategies, such as physical exercise, relaxation, meditation, yoga, listening to soft music, and many others can be helpful in this regard, they still mainly deal with just the symptoms of our upset.

Why Not Make Your Anger Disappear?

There's a fourth coping option, but few people know it exists, much less know what is required to bring it about. This option is simply to make your angry feelings quickly **disappear**, whenever they might be bothering you.

In order to master this little-known coping skill, you'll need to become expert at recognizing the hidden (i.e., internal) causes of your anger.

I've been using this powerful coping skill in my own life for the past 30 years. I've also taught it to many other people. Almost anyone can learn to make their anger quickly disappear in this way, but there are very few teachers around who can show you how to do this.

The Advantages Are Impressive

The advantages of this fourth coping option are quite impressive:

- You don't have to worry about expressing your anger, once you know how to make it quickly and easily go away;
- You won't have any anger left to suppress, deny, medicate, or otherwise push down inside of you, only to come out later in perhaps a destructive way;
- You won't have to worry about punching any punching bags, or taking deep breaths, or using any other time-consuming stress management techniques (unless you want to use them for other beneficial purposes).

Learning how to make feelings of anger (and other negative emotions) quickly and easily disappear is a handy coping skill that everyone should know how to master. Later in Section 4 of this book, I'll tell you how you can learn to make anger and other negative emotions (such as guilt, fear, worry, frustration, and sadness) quickly disappear whenever you want. I only wish I had known about this extremely useful coping skill when I was your age and in college.

STRESS MYTH #7: Stress Makes You Motivated And More Productive

In this discussion, I'm going to explain why it is a myth to believe that stress is necessary to motivate you and to make you productive.

Stress Makes You Less Productive!

While many people think that being under stress helps them to be more productive, the reverse is actually true.

Whatever level of productivity you achieve when you are seriously under stress is not being achieved because of that stress. It is being achieved despite being under stress.

And while it may be true that many people, including many college students, use anxiety, or other types of external pressures, to motivate them to buckle down and study, they could be just as productive, or perhaps even more so, if they didn't rely upon external motivators, but motivated themselves from within instead.

Misery Needs Company

Unfortunately, most people who believe in this myth are so afraid to abandon it, that they never find out they could be just as effective without all the external motivators they believe are so essential. Their fear of not being productive keeps them from exploring other possibilities, and it blocks them from discovering how well they could do without depending upon stress to motivate them.

Also, the more you have people around you who believe in this popular myth, the more difficult it will be for you to let go of this faulty notion. The more you see other friends and classmates depending upon heightened levels of anxiety to finally settle down and get some task done, the more you will assume you need to do the same thing as well. Also, you may be fearful that others who use this method will leapfrog ahead of you, if you don't.

Thus, this myth keeps getting propagated, not because there is any truth to it, but because it's so difficult for people to let go of it long enough to test the theory and find out that it doesn't hold water.

Numerous studies have shown that highly-stressed, highly-productive people do not stop being productive when they learn how to reduce their levels of anxiety and stress. In fact, many of them become even more productive, because their energy is freed up from having to manage their worry, guilt, anxiety, or any other emotions that they were previously depending upon to motivate them.

Next, we will tackle another big myth that almost everyone believes in. This is the myth that stress is an inevitable, unavoidable part of modern life. This could actually be the biggest and most damaging myth of all we've identified so far. And you may have to work very hard to remove it from your mind.

STRESS MYTH #8: Stress Is An Inevitable, Unavoidable Part Of Modern Life

I want to take serious issue with this popular, but mistaken, notion that stress is an inevitable, unavoidable part of modern life.

Please be clear, I am not the only stress expert who considers this a flawed and damaging idea. There have been others who have spoken out about it, but our voices are so few in number that we are constantly drowned out by the millions and millions of other voices who argue for this opposing point of view.

There's a very wise saying, "Argue for your limitations...and they shall be yours!" which couldn't apply more to this popular, misguided notion about stress. After all, if stress really is inevitable, then we are more or less "off the hook."

We don't have to waste our time trying to learn how to overcome it, because this would be foolish.

And while it may be very true that there are many aspects of modern life that we do find stressful—24/7 access to computers and cell phones, overcrowding, crime, terrorism, a weak job market, financial insecurity, international competition, etc.—not all people are equally "stressed" (and some may not be stressed at all) by these same external factors.

There are many people alive today who are living in potentially high-stress situations, yet they have little or no stress in their lives at all. And if they do become stressed, they know how to quickly and effectively deal with it, so there is minimal impact upon their health, happiness, or their personal sense of well-being.

Our Education System Has Failed You

Our education system—the one you're still in—is failing us (and you) in many ways. We are lagging behind other nations, for instance, in the way we educate our students about science and math. Other people complain that most college campuses actively promote very "liberal," left-leaning political points of view, and don't give much credence to other legitimate political perspectives.

But I think our education system is failing us (and you) in another important way. I think our system is even worse at educating students to understand themselves as human beings, and at preparing them to successfully navigate life's many ups and downs, without being horribly stressed in the process.

This is one of the big reasons why I decided to write this book, and to make it available to all college students (and to those about to enter college) for free. It's also why I decided to make some of my more expensive, advanced stress mastery training programs available to all college students at a very low price, and to also give them a way to easily obtain these trainings for free, by sharing this valuable information with other college students they know.

NOTE: I'll explain more about what these advanced training programs, are and how you can take advantage of them, in Section 4 of this book.

What Should You Know About Being Human?

There are far too many things you should know about being human for me to go into detail about them in this book.

However, I don't think students should be allowed to graduate from high school (or college) unless they can tell you exactly what causes human beings to become angry (i.e., what the hidden, internal causes of anger are).

NOTE: I show you what these hidden causes are at the end of Section 3.

Similarly, no high school or college student should be allowed to graduate until they can demonstrate that they know exactly what causes people to feel anxious, or what causes people to feel sad, guilty, worried, or frustrated.

NOTE: You can learn about the hidden causes of these specific emotions in one of the advanced training programs I'll tell you more about in Section 4.

This is absolutely essential information (i.e., understanding the hidden causes of common negative emotions) that you need to know in order to deal with life successfully. And it's extremely sad that this knowledge is not being taught today, even though it's simple to teach.

I also believe that no one should be allowed to graduate from high school or college today, unless they can pass a lie detector test to prove they fully understand that using alcohol, cigarettes, illegal drugs, and even prescription medications (and stress management techniques) only deals with the SYMPTOMS of their problems. These coping strategies do nothing to help you learn how to identify and deal with underlying CAUSES.

Wouldn't it be great if every graduating high school or college student had to formally take an oath like this in order to get their diploma? They would have to stand up and clearly state, with honesty, sincerity, and conviction, "I fully understand that dealing with just the symptoms of any problem I might have in life will usually not make my problem go away. I also understand that the best way to deal with any problem in life is to identify and then deal with its underlying causes, even if I might not know how to do this at first."

Now I may have gone a bit over the top with both the lie detector and the formal oath requirement, but what do you think the world would be like today if the educators in my era had actually instituted such requirements 30 or 40 years ago?

Stress Will Be Inevitable For You...If You Don't Know How To Deal With Internal Causes

That so many people continue to believe in this myth that stress is an inevitable, unavoidable part of modern life is more of a testament to our lack of proper education than it is a statement about stress (or about life) in general.

Here's a news flash for you—life, itself, is not stressful.

It is we human beings who generate most of the stress we experience today, just as human beings have been doing for thousands of years. However, when you don't know exactly how you are generating stress in your life...well, then I guess you might conclude it has nothing to do with you...and everything to do with an external world that just happens to be unfairly stacked against you.

On the other hand, once you begin to understand exactly how you are generating specific types of stress in your life (through specific hidden, internal causes that you may not be good at recognizing right now), the world around you suddenly changes in a big and important way.

Eventually, a light goes on in your head, and you begin to realize that what you now understand about where stress truly comes from in your life, is a total game changer.

I've spent the past 30 years teaching people how to eliminate stress in just this way. This is what I didn't know about stress—and didn't know that I didn't know about it—for the first 30 years of my life. But now that I do understand what's really going on, my life in regards to stress, has transformed dramatically.

I invite you to take on the goal of learning as much as you can about the **internal causes** of your stress. I know you probably have many other things to focus on right now, just to fulfill your academic requirements. But any time you can devote to this very important topic will make both your current and future life, so much better.

And the more you take on this self-education challenge, the more you will begin to realize that you really can learn how to eliminate much of the stress in your life, that you once may have thought was completely unavoidable.

STRESS MYTH #9: Your MIND Plays A Huge Role In Most Of The Psychological Stress You Experience

The final myth I want to discuss is also difficult for most people to embrace. Once again, we've been so indoctrinated to think in certain ways, and to accept certain premises as being incontrovertibly true, that it's hard to let go of some of our cherished beliefs, even when they turn out to be wrong.

When most people start looking within themselves to discover additional (internal) causes of their stress, that were previously hidden from their view, instead of totally blaming their parents, their teachers, their classmates, their skin color, or any other external factors, their first impulse may be to assume that any internal factors they identify exist primarily in their mind.

And while it may seem logical that this is exactly where they do exist (don't worry, we'll get into what some of these internal factors are in Section 3 of this book), they really exist within your **entire body**, not just your brain or your mind.

Again, it might seem this is another trivial semantic point, like the difference between calling your problems "stress" and actually clarifying the exact problems that are bothering you.

I can't go into detail about the significance of this myth right now, because we haven't talked yet about what some of these hidden, internal causes are. But once we do that, I'll come back to this popular myth and show you why it makes sense to think somewhat differently.

So there you have a very quick overview of the 9 biggest myths about stress that exist in our society today. You've also gotten a glimpse of what is flawed or misleading about each of them.

Don't worry if you're not 100% buying into my suggested corrections for each of these myths. As we delve deeper into the nature of human stress in this book, the overall picture should become much clearer for you.

Remember, if our education system hadn't failed you so badly on this score, you would already understand these key points, say by the time you were 12 or so. In that case, there wouldn't be a need for a book like this, and you wouldn't be sitting here reading one—and hopefully having your mind stretched in good and beneficial way.

Have Reasonable Expectations

As you continue reading on in this book, it's important for you to have reasonable expectations about what this book can and can't do for you:

- The primary purpose of this book is to introduce you to new ways of thinking about stress that you may not have been exposed to before.
- This book is not a training in how to quickly reduce any college-related stress you may be having right now. In my opinion, there are no “quick fixes” to solving most of the stress-related difficulties most people have.
- If you truly want to learn how to lessen or eliminate most of your college (and future) stress, you first have to begin by changing the entire way you think about stress. Once you've freed your mind from the 9 big myths I briefly touched on in this section (and that we will continue to explore in this book), then...and only then...can you expect to have any meaningful breakthroughs in your ability to deal with stress more effectively.
- While this book is not designed to teach you how to immediately relieve any stress you might be having in your life right now, it will give you a new foundation for understanding what's really going on. And you can continue to build upon this new foundation as time goes on (I'll give you some specific recommendations for how to do this in Section 4).
- Don't assume, however, that just because this book doesn't give you specific instructions for reducing your stress immediately, you won't be able to benefit from it right away (and without additional training). There are many ways that just reading this book, all the way through, can help you deal with your current stress problems...sometimes very significantly. There is a great deal to be gained simply from improving your understanding about what stress really is, where it comes from in your life, and what your best options are for dealing with it. So when you finish reading this book, you will know more about stress than most other people alive today. And you'll also be able to put some of your new knowledge to use in your life immediately, without any additional training.

Section 2: Don't Manage Your Stress... Banish It Instead!

In this section, I'm going to explain in more detail why managing stress is not your best coping option (Myth #3). I'm also going to introduce you to a very powerful three-step coping method I call "The Ultimate Method For Dealing With Stress," which I believe is far superior to stress management.

I'm also going to show you why knowing **stress is just a word** (Myth #1) is important. This is because you can't even begin to use the Ultimate Method successfully, until you are totally grounded in this way of thinking.

Stress Management Isn't The Answer

Let's be honest, most of us experience stress from time to time. I don't care if you are a teenager, a college student, a graduate or professional student, or even a sixty-something year old physician and stress coach like myself.

Perhaps you have family problems at home; conflicts with friends, classmates, or teachers at school; or just too many pressures to easily handle.

Maybe you feel tense, anxious or irritable much of the time. Or you suffer from headaches, backaches, indigestion, insomnia or some other physical problem that is either caused by or aggravated by stress.

I'm going to assume that if you've been struggling with stress for any amount of time, you've probably tried to manage it.

If you're like me, however, or like most of the patients in my medical practice, you've also probably discovered that using stress management techniques can be a losing proposition.

Why? Because, no matter how much you try to relax, how many miles you run, or how much music you listen to, stress just keeps on happening in your life. And using stress management techniques rarely gives you the long-term stress relief you're truly looking for.

You Are Not The Problem!

If you've been struggling to manage your stress and have not been successful... I've got some news for you... YOU are NOT the problem!

As I pointed out in the Section 1 of this book, the primary reason why stress keeps happening in your life (and in the lives of other college students) is not because you are unable to get rid of it.

It's because you and I live in a world where stress is **deeply, profoundly, and widely misunderstood.**

As you've seen, we have many myths and misconceptions about stress that cloud our thinking and keep us from coping with most of our stress successfully.

Here's an example of one of the 9 widespread myth about stress (Myth #8) that I found mentioned in a book called *The Stress Myth*, by Richard Ecker:

“We like to believe that stress is inevitable—that life is so much more complex these days, that we're being dragged around by a runaway world which offers us less and less that we can depend on.

But this belief is nothing but a myth, a myth that is at the core of the stress problem....This myth...has done more to perpetuate unwanted stress in our society than any other single factor.

Ironically, the main proponents of this myth are the very ones who claim to be teaching people how to deal with stress.”

Richard Ecker: The Stress Myth

Stress Management refers to a wide range of relaxation techniques and life coping skills.

Common Stress Management Techniques

- Deep breathing exercises
- Meditation
- Biofeedback
- Yoga
- Relaxing massages
- Tai Chi/Eastern body exercises
- Listening to music
- Physical exercise
- Dietary changes
- Time management skills
- Assertiveness training
- Learning to avoid stressful situations
- Taking regular vacations

All of these can have psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits. They are also healthier and safer than turning to cigarettes, alcohol, prescription drugs, illegal drugs, or food to relieve “stress.”

But as I’ve already alluded to, there are some serious disadvantages to managing stress that haven’t been widely publicized.

Here are some excerpts from a Special Report I wrote some time ago that describes the **ten most important reasons** why you shouldn’t rely upon stress management as your primary coping strategy.

NOTE: I am NOT saying managing stress is bad for you or that it's something you should never do. All I'm trying to point out is there are even better ways to deal with stress, and if you know how to take advantage of these more advanced coping strategies, you will probably find them even more desirable and beneficial than stress management. But if you don't know how to use these other coping strategies right now, managing stress is certainly better than doing nothing. It's also much better than using potentially harmful coping strategies, like the ones mentioned above.

10 GOOD REASONS WHY YOU SHOULDN'T MANAGE STRESS



A SPECIAL REPORT BY
DOC ORMAN, M.D.
WWW.DOCORMAN.COM

10 Good Reasons Why You Shouldn't Manage Stress

Here are ten good reasons why you might not want to manage your stress.

Personally, I've never found stress management all that satisfying. By the end of this discussion, I think you'll understand why.

1. Time-Consuming

A number of stress management techniques require time from your schedule each day for regular practice. Some even require 15-30 minutes or more, two or three times every day, to be effective.

Many people are much too busy to devote 15-30 minutes two or three times each day to do relaxation exercises or to use other stress management techniques. Hence, time constraints is one big drawback of trying to manage stress.

2. Commitment And Discipline

To be effective at relieving stress, stress management techniques such as physical exercise, meditation, yoga, relaxation, and many others must be practiced continuously, over a long time period.

This requires commitment and daily discipline which many people lack.

Even if you start out well, with high hopes and strong intentions, your commitment to continue practicing these techniques may wane after several weeks or months. Thus, the need for long-term commitment and discipline is another major drawback to managing stress.

3. Limited Benefit

It's important to recognize that stress management techniques are often limited in their benefits. For example, stress management isn't very helpful for problems such as the death of a loved one or loss of one's job.

Therefore, when a big problem occurs, managing stress, even if you do it very well, may not bring you all the comfort and relief you want.

Say a relationship that you valued just ended, and you're feeling down, or you are facing increased academic pressures at school. In response to this stress, you could decide to work out more or run several miles each day. And while these coping strategies might help you feel a little better, they might only relieve a small amount of the stress you are feeling. Similarly, your academic pressures would not be reduced at all.

So while using stress management techniques might allow you to bear your stressful problems a little better, unless you apply some other coping strategies, your problems will likely continue to bother you.

4. Short-Lived Benefit

Even when stress management gives you the immediate relief you want, this is often short-lived. After a period of time, your stress may come back, and you'll once more have to manage it as you did before.

Now, if the first four drawbacks to managing stress I highlighted above aren't bad enough, there's one **whopper of a disadvantage** that almost everyone intuitively understands.

This is the granddaddy of all weaknesses of stress management. And this is the primary reason why I believe managing stress is not your best coping option.

5. Deals With Symptoms—Not Causes!

As we've already seen, most stress management techniques deal **with just the symptoms** of your problems. They don't help you identify and deal with the underlying causes of your day-to-day difficulties.

In my mind, this is the **main disadvantage** of managing stress.

Think about this for a moment—If the engine warning light on the dashboard of your car suddenly started flashing, would you ask a mechanic to disconnect the wire to the bulb?

Of course you wouldn't do that.

But isn't this exactly what you are doing when you focus on reducing or masking only the symptoms of your stress?

Wouldn't it be much better if you were able to learn how to identify and deal with the underlying **causes**?

This one drawback alone should make everyone think twice (or more) about relying upon stress management as their primary coping strategy.

6. Doesn't Resolve Problems

For precisely the reason noted above, managing just the symptoms of stress guarantees, for the most part, that your stress is going to come back, over and over again.

This is likely to happen no matter how good you become at managing just its symptoms.

Anyone who looks at this coping strategy objectively will recognize it lacks wisdom. However, when we are feeling stressed, and we are struggling to keep our head above water, we tend not to notice how flawed this popular coping strategy really is.

7. Little Self-Empowerment

Symptom-oriented stress management techniques, such as physical exercise, relaxation, listening to music, yoga, meditation, etc., do very little to raise our self-awareness about the underlying causes of our problems.

They also do little to empower us to deal with these causes effectively.

There are a few stress management techniques, however, such as certain types of meditation practices, that do seem to have a dual benefit. While providing some stress relief in the form of relaxation, they also "retrain" our minds and expand our conscious awareness, so that we may not be generating quite as much stress as before.

However, even these dual-purpose techniques don't end up empowering us anywhere near as much as we are capable of.

8. Stops Exploration

Another major drawback with managing stress is that it keeps us from searching for, and discovering, even better ways of coping.

This same drawback is seen in many people who develop alcoholism and other drug addictions. Chemical “solutions” tend to work, at least in the short-run, to help people feel better fast. However, when a person relies upon this approach consistently, they may never become motivated to search for better coping strategies, even though such strategies are available and are safer and have greater long-term rewards.

9. Creates Dependency

Like other symptom-oriented approaches (such as using cigarettes, alcohol, illegal drugs, overeating, etc.), the more we rely upon stress management techniques, the more we become dependent upon them.

Such dependencies on stress management techniques can be good for us in certain ways, as the harmful effects of stress on our bodies may be mitigated.

However, this same dependency may be keeping us from searching for, and mastering, even better coping options. So in this sense, it can have damaging effects as well.

10. Perpetuates Myths and Misconceptions

Here's a final drawback to consider, which most people don't give much thought to. In order to become an advocate of stress management, not only do you have to force yourself to deny all of the many drawbacks and limitations noted above, but you also have to endorse many myths and misconceptions about stress (like the 9 big myths we discussed in Section 1).

These popular myths include widespread false beliefs such as:

- Stress is an unavoidable, inevitable part of modern life.
- The very best way to deal with stress is to manage it.
- The causes of stress are mostly beyond our direct personal control.

When we promote the use of stress management, therefore, we are also promoting many false beliefs that are also necessary to maintain this coping mindset.

Thus, promoting stress management can be harmful on a much wider scale, since if large numbers of people are convinced to believe in myths about stress, they may have trouble recognizing that there are indeed better ways to cope with it.

So What Is The Answer?.....What's The Alternative?

There is a good alternative to managing stress.

I've already alluded to it—make your stress quickly and naturally go away (or lessen) by **directly addressing its underlying causes**.

Now, I know you're probably thinking..."that's all well and good, but I don't have much control over the main causes of my stress."

I used to think like this too. And you know what? As long as I thought about stress in this way, I didn't have much control over it either.

Remember, if you think you don't have much control over stress in your life, you are not alone.

Most of us are much more capable of dealing with stress than we realize. That's because the real problem today is that most of us have been terribly misinformed about stress. As I've already pointed out:

- We've been badly misinformed about what stress really is.
- We've been misinformed about where stress actually comes from in our lives (i.e., its true causes).
- And we've also been misinformed about the best ways to cope with it.

Sadly, we are living in a world today where myths and misconceptions about stress rule the day, and where our lack of understanding is costing us our health, our happiness, our emotional well-being, our ability to create harmonious relationships with others, and much, much more.

The Ultimate Method For Dealing With Stress

The very best method for coping with **stress**, or any other problems in life, is to address your **problems** as follows:

- 1) Identify each problem specifically;
- 2) Identify the main causes of each problem;
- 3) Deal with the causes effectively.

Human beings have been using this Ultimate Method successfully throughout recorded history. In fact, even at your age, you've probably used it hundreds of times yourself.

But we don't often use it when we're trying to cope with our stress.

Granted, some underlying causes may not be under our direct personal control, and others may not be easy to identify.

But when they are under our control, and when we do take appropriate steps to identify them and correct them, our problems almost always get better, or even go away entirely.

You Can Learn To Use This Ultimate Method Successfully

Wouldn't you love to know how to eliminate any type of stress in your life, quickly and easily, without having to manage it?

You may think this is impossible, but it's not.

In fact, thousands of people are successfully dealing with stress in just this way. And you can learn how to do this as well.

It all starts with adopting a new type of mindset, like the one I am sharing with you in this book.

Why Listen To Me?

Now why should you listen to me when I tell you that you can learn how to use this Ultimate Method expertly, or that you have much more ability to deal with stress than you (or your friends) believe? Why should you listen to me at all, since I'm just a medical doctor? Do physicians really understand stress all that well?

The answer is no, most physicians don't.

Most doctors know a good bit about the consequences of too much stress. We especially understand its negative effects on our bodies and the many health problems it can produce. But when it comes to helping people eliminate stress, or dealing with our own personal or professional challenges, most physicians are no more knowledgeable than anyone else.

I know this is true because I practiced Internal Medicine for 23 years, and during that time, I encountered a large number of stressed out colleagues. I was also a highly-stressed physician myself, until I learned how to change my whole way of thinking about stress.

Not A Typical Doctor

So don't listen to me just because I went to medical school and have the letters M.D. after my name.

I invite you to listen to me because I am not a typical medical doctor. About 30 years ago, I recognized that most of what I was taught about stress in medical school wasn't true. I then spent several years researching better ways of thinking about and understanding human stress, and this eventually enabled me to have major breakthroughs in my ability to deal with stress successfully.

And the benefits were truly amazing.

After many years of hopelessly struggling to control my emotions, especially strong negative emotions like anger, guilt, frustration, fear, worry, and sadness, I finally discovered what was really causing these emotions to occur. And these new insights enabled me to get rid of these bothersome emotions faster than ever before.

I was also able to dramatically improve the quality of my relationships. Virtually every area of my life, where I previously experienced high levels of stress, quickly turned around. And as I kept learning and discovering many new things about stress, **that I never correctly understood before**, I decided to teach what I had learned to others.

In 1981, I taught my first stress mastery course to employees at the hospital where I completed my medical residency. Since then, I've conducted many additional seminars and workshops for thousands of other individuals.

I also went on to author several books and special reports about stress, including one of the best books about stress ever written, *The 14 Day Stress Cure*, which received a non-fiction book-of-the-year award from the National Association of Independent Publishers.

So don't listen to me just because I am a physician. Consider listening to me because I've learned how to master stress in my own life, and because I've successfully taught others to do the same.

You Too Can Learn How To Master Your Stress

I wrote this book to let you and other college students know that you too can learn how to master stress in your life, no matter how much you may have struggled to deal with it in the past.

The only problem is, you won't be taught how to do this in any of your college classes. Nor will you be exposed to the information you'll need in any of your extra-curricular activities during your college career.

How do I know this?

I know this because in order to finally learn how to master stress in my own life, I had to first overcome much of my formal education. I had to give myself permission to think differently about stress than almost everyone else around me.

It wasn't easy for me to finally free myself from many of the myths and misconceptions about stress that were given to me by others. And it won't be easy for you either, but you absolutely can do it. And you've got a great guidebook like this, which I didn't have, to get you started on the right path.

Unfortunately, like most things of great value in life, there is no “quick fix” or magic formula that will enable you to do this. It will take some work and some dedication on your part, but not as much as you might think.

It will also require you to have an open mind, and to be willing to challenge much of what you currently believe to be true about stress.

Congratulations! You're On The Right Path

Your new path to stress mastery begins right here...with this book.

In Section 4, I'm going to give you a roadmap to follow. And if you are interested in becoming expert at relieving stress in your life, or even if you just want to know a little more about it, I think you'll find this guidance very helpful.

But just by simply reading this book, you're already well on your way.

Don't be in a hurry, however, to have your stress quickly disappear. Yes, it would be great if I could show you how to do this instantly, but I can't.

What I can do, however, is teach you how to fundamentally change the entire way you think about stress. And this will naturally, over time, lead you to newer and better ways of coping with it.

I can help you build a new foundation for understanding stress that will serve you well for many years to come. And once you have this new foundation in place, you'll be able to begin making use of it to discover how to make many types of stress in your life quickly disappear.

Have patience. The stress relief you so dearly want will eventually come to you in time. But first, we need to continue building your new foundation of understanding.

Stress Management vs. Stress Mastery

The main difference between **stress management** and **stress mastery** can be summed up as follows:

- Stress management mainly deals with just the **symptoms** of your recurring problems in life;
- Stress mastery is the art of knowing how to eliminate your recurring problems by identifying and dealing with their underlying **causes**.

That's the main difference...in a nutshell.

I don't know about you, but I'd rather know how to deal with the causes of my problems, than spend time trying to "manage" just their symptoms alone.

Now don't get me wrong, many stress management techniques, such as adopting a healthy diet, getting regular physical exercise, meditating, practicing yoga, or using other relaxation strategies have positive, health-enhancing benefits.

And there is absolutely nothing wrong with taking advantage of these.

But when it comes to choosing the very best option for dealing with stressful problems in your life, I think most people would agree that it's usually better to deal with underlying causes than to simply attend to symptoms alone.

First, You Have To Get Specific

If you want to be able to deal more effectively with the underlying causes of your "stress," many of which may be hidden from your view right now, the first thing you need to do is to retrain yourself to **get more specific**.

NOTE: In the next Section of this book, I'll explain just what these hidden causes are. Identifying these hidden causes (along with the more obvious ones) is the second key step in the Ultimate Method, and it is very important to know how to do this correctly. However, I want to focus on the first step in the Ultimate Method right now, because if you get this first step wrong, it won't matter very much if you know how to complete the other two steps.

As I pointed out in Section 1, once you correctly understand that "stress" is never your problem, this will naturally require you to get more specific about the exact problem or problems that are troubling you.

- Are you getting angry all the time?
- Are you feeling frustrated?
- Are you having difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep?
- Are you having physical or health problems?
- Family problems?
- Social problems?
- Academic problems?
- Substance abuse problems?
- Money problems?
- Self-esteem problems?
- Self-Confidence problems?
- Other problems?

This is the **first critical step** in the Ultimate Method.

Unfortunately, the stress management mentality that's so prevalent in our society today teaches us to lump all our problems together and then think of them as one composite problem called "stress."

This misguided way of thinking robs us of the clarity we need to focus on our problems individually, which is absolutely essential if we want to identify and deal with their underlying causes.

No wonder why so many people find eliminating stress so difficult today, and why they believe (quite incorrectly) that achieving mastery over stress is not really possible.

Why Do You Need To Get More Specific?

If you are only interested in managing the symptoms of your problems, you don't need to bother with getting more specific.

But if you want to go for stress mastery, and learn how to identify and deal with underlying causes, you will absolutely need to develop this skill.

The reason is because **specific problems** usually have very **specific causes**.

And once you become good at learning how to identify these causes (many of which are hidden from view), you'll be able to make most types of "stress" in your life quickly disappear, without needing to use drugs, relaxation exercises, or other time-consuming stress management techniques.

You'll Be Amazed How Easy This Is!

As I'm sure you agree, the very best way to cope with stress (i.e. problems) in life is NOT to manage just their symptoms, but rather to:

Step 1: Specify the problem or problems you are having.

Step 2: Identify the major causes of each problem.

Step 3: Deal with those causes until your "stress" either improves or completely disappears.

I've spent the past 30 years teaching people how to accomplish each of these three steps. And the results people have achieved, once they learn how to do this, are truly remarkable.

Most people today, however, including most highly-educated college graduates, find it very difficult to cope with stress in this way. Not because they lack the ability to do so, but rather because **they haven't been trained** to deal with stress in this fashion.

Most importantly, they haven't been trained to correctly understand where stress really comes from in their lives. This will be the topic of the next, and perhaps most important, section of this book.

Section 3: How to Correctly Understand The Causes of Your Stress

KEY POINT: Being able to recognize and deal with underlying causes of common problems in life is the **critical difference** separating people who are good at dealing with stress from those who are not.

In this section, I'm going to introduce you to some new ways of thinking about the causes of human stress. This is perhaps the most important section of this book. As you learn to correctly identify the real causes of stress (i.e. problems) in your life, you'll be able to benefit immediately from this new awareness, and you'll be much better able to solve your problems more quickly and effectively.

The catch here is that many of the causes of stress in your life, including stressful problems you may be struggling with in college, are often **hidden from your view**.

Unless you know how to identify these hidden causes, even your best and most valiant efforts to free yourself from stress will usually be unsuccessful.

Why People Don't Use The Ultimate Method More Often

The main reason why people don't use the Ultimate Method for coping with their stress is that we haven't been taught to correctly identify the true causes of our everyday problems.

But you can learn to do this, and that's what this section is all about.

The good news is you don't have to be a psychiatrist, psychologist, or even a high school graduate to understand these causes.

They are actually quite simple, as you will soon discover.

Brief Review of Key Concepts

Before we move on to this very important topic, let's review what you should have learned so far.

Here are some of the key concepts I've covered in this book, up to this point:

- 1) "Stress" is just a word.
- 2) "Stress" is a word that stands for hundreds of different problems in our lives.
- 3) When you think you are suffering from "stress," you are not. You are really suffering from very specific problems in your life.
- 4) If you only deal with the symptoms of your problems, and never identify or deal with their underlying causes, your problems will likely persist and may even get worse.
- 5) Stress management techniques, such as meditation, physical exercise, and listening to music, mainly deal with just the symptoms of your problems.
- 6) The best (i.e. ultimate) way to deal with problems in life is to identify them correctly, then identify their causes, and then deal with those causes effectively.
- 7) While this may appear to be a simple method to follow, it is actually quite challenging. Otherwise, everyone would already be using it.

Correctly Understanding the Causes of Your Stress

When it comes to recognizing the causes of our “stress,” we are good at identifying certain causes and not very good at identifying others.

Missing Puzzle Pieces

Consider the following example of John, a 35-year-old sales executive, who frequently experiences traffic jam stress:

John: “I have a terrible time coping with traffic jams. I’ve got a very busy schedule, and I really get steamed when some jerk doesn’t keep his eye on the road and causes me to miss an important meeting. Sure, I know what’s causing my stress to occur, but most of the time, it’s beyond my control.”

John thinks he understands the causes of his stress: poor drivers. But he’s only identifying **half the puzzle pieces**.

Poor drivers are just part of the reason John gets so upset by traffic jams. There are other causes involved, but John doesn’t recognize these causes, because they’re not obvious to him.

However, if John did have all the puzzle pieces (causes) available to him, he would more correctly (and more fully) understand why he gets so “stressed” in traffic jams.

He might even find that he has **much more control** over his reactions to traffic jams than he gives himself credit for.

Obvious and Hidden Causes

Stress in human being usually results from two main types of causes:

- **Obvious Causes**
- **Hidden Causes**

Obvious causes are the ones everyone usually notices. Hidden causes are the **missing puzzle pieces** most of us typically fail to recognize.

Look at the following list of obvious causes of stress for a moment, and note any of these that have ever been associated with stress in your life: .

- Traffic jams
- Making a speech to a group
- Having a tight deadline to meet
- Having too many duties or responsibilities to fulfill
- Dealing with difficult people
- Conflicts with parents or relatives
- Being worried about getting good grades
- Dealing with an illness or injury
- Dealing with illness or injury in a friend or loved one
- Financial pressures
- Getting into trouble with the law

Now, how much of a role do you think these **obvious causes** played in causing any stress you may have experienced?

- 90% or more?
- 50%?
- 10% or less?

If you answered 90% or more, you have lots of company. This is how most of us, since early childhood, have been taught to think about the causes of our problems.

If you answered either 50% or 10%, you are much closer to the truth.

While obvious causes usually do play some role, **hidden causes of stress** are also involved in each of these types of problems. And these hidden causes are often equally important, or sometimes even more so, than the obvious causes most people easily see (and tend to blame exclusively).

So what are these hidden causes? And where do they come from?

The Role Of Language In Human Stress

One of the unique things about human beings is that **we live our lives in language**.

Some of the unique linguistic behaviors that only humans are capable of include:

- Making promises and requests
- Imagining future events
- Judging and interpreting what happens to us
- Asking questions about the world in which we live



Some other animals, such as porpoises, whales, and chimpanzees can engage in rudimentary forms of “linguistic” interactions. But we are the only species capable of complex linguistic behaviors, such as those above.



Human Conversations

When trying to understand why we have so much stress in our lives, it's important to recognize that we are all born into--and live our entire lives within--a virtual sea of past and present human conversations. Many of the conversations we live in today are the result of thousands, even millions, of previous conversations.

For example, many of our contemporary thoughts and ideas can be traced back to **Plato, Aristotle**, and other early Greek thinkers. As Americans, we can trace many of our modern beliefs to **Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson**, and other founding fathers, who established certain core values for our society.

I know that the societal and cultural conversations I was born into 63 years ago were very different than those you were born into only 20 or so years ago. When I went to college, we didn't have discussions about texting, cell phones, or even the internet. We did have conversations, however, about segregation, civil rights, and how to avoid getting drafted and going to Viet Nam.

Human conversations are sometimes called:

- Thoughts
- Beliefs
- Opinions
- Attitudes
- Etc.

I prefer the term "conversations," because it describes cognitive events as functions of language, which they all are. But however we label them, they affect us profoundly, and they play a huge role in how much stress we experience.

Broad Influence

Conversations determine such things as how we:

- Feel
- Perceive
- Experience life
- Behave
- Understand our identity
- Evaluate our self-worth

How Our Own Internal Conversations and Action Patterns Cause Stress

Our own thoughts and behaviors (or **conversations** and **action patterns**) play a central role in causing much of our stress.

These are the **hidden causes of stress**, or **missing puzzle pieces**, that we often fail to appreciate.

But all hope is not lost—you can learn to recognize these hidden causes, if you just know what to look for.

And once you know how to do this—once you have all the causes, both obvious and hidden, of any problem in front of you—you will immediately see many more options for dealing with your problems than if you are only working with just the obvious causes.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

ONE OF THE MAIN PURPOSES OF THIS BOOK IS TO HELP YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND AND, IDENTIFY THE HIDDEN CAUSES OF YOUR STRESS.

WHY?

BECAUSE THIS IS THE SECRET TO MAKING STRESS NATURALLY DISAPPEAR, WITHOUT HAVING TO USE DRUGS, RELAXATION, PHYSICAL EXERCISE, OR OTHER STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES.

How Do Our Internal Conversations Cause Stress?

Let's return to John and his traffic jam stress.

John didn't realize that there was more contributing to his traffic jam stress than just the obvious traffic congestion. For John, getting stuck in traffic immediately triggered certain internal conversations (and action patterns) within him that he mostly was unaware of.

His attention was so automatically focused on just the obvious causes, that he never paid attention to these internal patterns that were also contributing to his stress.

Take a look at the following list of conversations that typically get triggered for people when they find themselves delayed by a traffic jam. Notice if any of these **internal conversations** have ever occurred for you:

Internal Conversations Commonly Triggered By Traffic Jams

- “This shouldn't be happening to me.”
- “Terrible things will happen if I don't get to my destination on time.”
- “I should always be able to go where I want, whenever I want.”
- “Whoever caused this mess to occur must have been an imbecile.”
- “Somebody should have warned me about this tie up.”
- “Sitting in a traffic jam is a stupid waste of my time.”

These internal conversations can add extra layers of **emotional distress** to an already bothersome situation.

John believed his traffic jam stress was caused primarily by other motorists. He never considered that his own **internal conversations** might be playing an even bigger role.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

IT IS RARELY EXTERNAL EVENTS ALONE (SUCH AS TRAFFIC JAMS) THAT CAUSE US TO GET UPSET.

RATHER, IT IS THE COUPLING OF EXTERNAL EVENTS WITH OUR OWN INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS (AND ACTION PATTERNS), THAT TOGETHER CAUSE US TO EXPERIENCE STRESS.

WE ARE NORMALLY VERY GOOD AT NOTICING EXTERNAL EVENTS. HOWEVER, WE HAVE NOT BEEN WELL-TRAINED TO RECOGNIZE OUR OWN INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS AND ACTION PATTERNS.

How Action Patterns Cause Stress

Let's now examine some **action patterns** that also contribute to traffic jam stress.

Notice if any of the following **action patterns** have ever caused you to end up in a traffic jam:

- Failing to listen to traffic reports or check for delays before venturing out.
- Choosing a route that's quicker and more direct, but leaves you fewer escape options if traffic should come to a halt.
- Blaming yourself for being "stupid" enough to get stuck.
- Leaving only enough time for your journey if everything goes smoothly, but no extra time to allow for unexpected problems.
- Complaining and getting more and more upset, instead of creatively finding something of value to do while you are waiting.

Each of these action patterns frequently plays a role in contributing to any traffic jam stress people experience.

NOTE: Sometimes you may engage in these behaviors and be aware of them **consciously**, like when you start blaming yourself. At other times, you may be engaging in these behaviors **unconsciously**, such as when you fail to check traffic reports.

Don't be concerned, at this point, about how to deal with these **hidden causes**. I'll eventually discuss how you can learn to cope with them later on.

NOTE: This way of thinking about stress is consistent with approaches advocated by leading cognitive and behavioral psychologists and rational emotive technique practitioners.

Automaticity And Triggering

Two concepts that can help you to think more clearly about the causes of human stress are automaticity and triggering.

Automaticity

Automaticity refers to the way **our bodies** typically respond in automatic (i.e. predictable) ways to certain external or internal stimuli (triggering events).

Triggering

Triggering refers to the external (or sometimes internal) **events** that initiate our automatic body responses.

In the well-known knee-jerk reflex, for example, a doctor may tap a particular spot just below your kneecap with a small rubber hammer.

When this is done, most people will notice their leg automatically jerks upward, without any conscious effort or intent.

In this example, the hammer tap would be the trigger, or triggering event, and the movement of your leg is your body's automatic response, or automaticity.

In life, our bodies are constantly being triggered by both external and internal events. Consider the following triggers:

- People interrupting us
- Traffic jams
- Bad weather
- Things not going as we planned
- Our own thoughts
- Advertising messages on TV

Here's another example.

Many people automatically experience fear whenever they see a snake.

For these individuals, just seeing a snake is the **trigger**, and the fear response that occurs in their bodies is their **automaticity**.

It's very important to notice, however, that not everyone responds to seeing a snake in exactly the same way. A zookeeper or a park ranger, for instance, might have a different body reaction—or no reaction at all—to the sudden appearance of a snake.

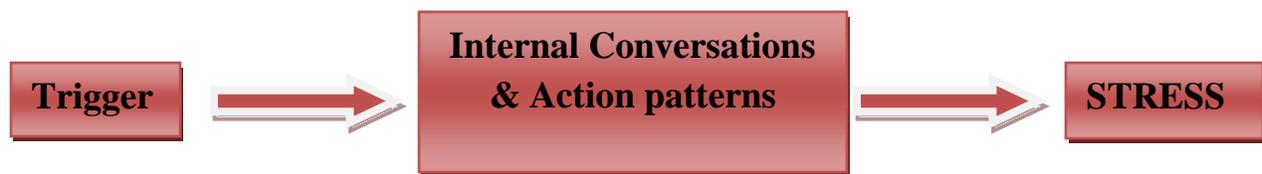
KEY PRINCIPLE:

HOW YOUR BODY GETS **PROGRAMMED** TO RESPOND AUTOMATICALLY TO SPECIFIC TRIGGERING EVENTS IS A FUNCTION OF YOUR UNIQUE **LIFE HISTORY** AND YOUR INDIVIDUAL **PAST EXPERIENCES**.

More About Internal Conversations and Action Patterns

One useful way to think about how internal conversations and action patterns contribute to our stress is to adopt a new conceptual model similar to the one illustrated below.

In this model, specific **triggers** or triggering events cause specific **internal conversations** and **action patterns** to become activated within our bodies. These internal conversations and action patterns then combine with external events to cause any **stress** we might experience:



When adopting this model, it is important to keep in mind:

- Our bodies are constantly bombarded by external, and sometimes internal, triggers or triggering events.
- Each triggering event can cause specific conversations and action patterns to automatically (i.e. without our intent) arise within us.
- The specific conversations and action patterns that automatically become triggered within us may not be the same as those that become triggered within others by the same or similar triggering event.

- Sometimes, the automatic conversations and action patterns that become triggered within us are helpful to us, like automatically looking both ways before crossing a busy street.

- At other times, however, they can get us into trouble, causing us to experience problems (stress)

Assess Your Progress So Far

If you've been following the concepts in this book so far, you should be able to agree with each of the following statements. See how many you actually do agree with:

- 1) The best way to deal with specific problems in life is to start by correctly identifying both the obvious and non-obvious causes.

- 2) Some people could have difficulty dealing with problems in this way, especially if they fail to identify the main causes correctly, or if they continue to focus on only obvious causes.

- 3) While it's tempting to assume that stress is primarily caused by external situations and events, internal causes within us are usually playing a prominent role as well.

- 4) The internal causes that contribute to our stress are best thought of as “conversations” and “action patterns” that become automatically activated within our bodies by specific external or internal triggering events.

- 5) When we become consciously aware of our internal causes, as well as the obvious causes that are more apparent, our chances for successfully dealing with our problems in life increase dramatically.

- 6) One reason why we often conclude that stress is an inevitable part of life, or that we can't do much to eliminate it, is that we've been mainly focusing on only the obvious causes of our problems. If we were able to easily recognize the hidden causes (within us) as well, we might discover that we do have more control over our stress than we imagine.

If you agree, or mostly agree, with each of the statements above, congratulations. You are well on the way to improving your ability to deal with stressful problems in your life—small and large.

If you had difficulty agreeing with one or more of these statements, don't be too concerned. It's still early in the game. Continue to read through the material in this book, and the principles discussed so far will probably become more clear to you.

Barriers You May Encounter

Here are some common barriers that may keep you from embracing the principles discussed so far in this book:

- 1) While it is possible to deal with problems in life by not analyzing and identifying underlying causes, most people would agree this skill is helpful. Perhaps you are concerned you won't correctly identify all the key hidden causes, and therefore you might get frustrated. I agree this could happen. However, if you hang in there with this book, until the end, you might discover that identifying the hidden causes of most types of stress is not all that difficult.
- 2) If you are having difficulty accepting the principle that internal causes play a role in most types of stress we experience, you are not alone. This notion is not easy for us to embrace. (I struggled with it myself for a long while, until it finally began to make sense to me.) All I can say is hang in there with this book, and by the end, you may find some aspects of this basic principle that you can agree with.

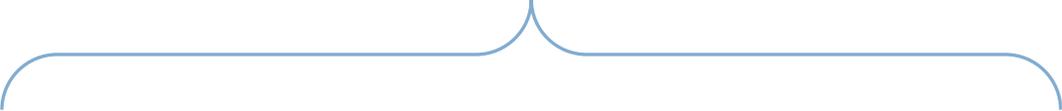
3) It is not essential that you accept my use of the terms “conversations” or “action patterns” in order to benefit from this book. You can choose any terms that you like, as long as they relate to human thoughts and behaviors. If you are opposed, however, to the premise that thoughts and/or behaviors contribute to your stress, well then you may have difficulty getting value from this information. I encourage you to keep reading on, as you may change your mind once you see some concrete examples that I share later on.

Two Common Pitfalls To Avoid

When people first start to change their thinking about stress, as I’m suggesting in this book, they can easily fall into two very common conceptual traps (or pitfalls) that can hinder their success.

Pitfall #1: Blaming Yourself

When you begin to accept the idea that some of the causes of your stress may be internal, rather than external, and when you start to recognize some of these previously hidden causes, you may begin to **blame yourself** for repeatedly acting in stress-producing ways. This is because many people make the mistake of assuming they could have (or should have) thought or acted otherwise. This simply is not true.



It’s difficult to **abruptly stop** having habitual thoughts or behaviors, just because you are now more aware of them. In fact, the odds are high that you’ll keep getting triggered, and that you’ll continue to think and behave in automatic ways, for quite some time.

Remember, you can’t simply stop your actual knee-jerk reaction from happening. The same is true for many of your established thoughts and behavior patterns as well.



So be kind to yourself.

Don't beat yourself up or blame yourself if you discover that some of your own habitual thought patterns or behavior patterns might be repeatedly contributing to stressful problems in your life.

Pitfall #2: Either/Or Thinking

A second pitfall is our cultural tendency to think in “Either/Or” terms. There are many types of Either/Or thinking that cause unnecessary stress for human beings. In fact, Either/Or thinking is one of the major categories of “hidden” causes that contains a number of specific internal causes, some of which I will describe shortly.

From a very young age, we are culturally conditioned to think in Either/Or terms. For example, we are taught to believe that things are either **black** or **white**. In this mode of thinking, if something is black, it can't be white. And if something is white, it can't be black. In other words, it's “one way or the other.”

In addition to causing specific types of stress in our lives, Either/Or thinking can also be applied (incorrectly), to how we think about all internal causes.

When we mistakenly apply Either/Or thinking to the whole range of internal causes, we can end up with a disempowering false dichotomy.

This can make it difficult for you (and others) to accept some of the most important ideas presented in this book.



False Dichotomy

“Either external events cause me to have stress, or internal causes do. If the answer is external events, then I am not to blame. If the answer is internal causes, then I must be to blame. It's one or the other.”

The Correct Way To Think About The Causes Of Human Stress

Actually, the correct way to think about the causes of human stress is from a Both/And, not an Either/Or, perspective.

It's not that either external events or internal causes are primarily responsible.

Rather, the truth about human stress is that both types of causes are always involved.

Why Feel Bad About Telling This Simple Truth?

There should be no blame, shame, regret, or remorse about looking within yourself and identifying internal causes of your stress.

There is absolutely no legitimate reason for you to ever feel bad about this.

Why should you feel bad about simply telling the truth? If you truly are playing a role in any stress you experience, what's the big deal about admitting this to yourself?

Telling the truth about any role you might be playing in causing your stress should be no more upsetting than if I were to truthfully say "I'm 5'7" tall, I have blue eyes, my hair is thinning, and oh, by the way, my thoughts and behaviors sometimes get me into trouble."

NOTE: If you are ever feeling bad about recognizing your own internal causes of stress, your bad feelings are likely being caused by other hidden conversations or action patterns (within you) that you haven't yet identified. See if you can spot some of these hidden causes that might be holding you back from embracing this critically important concept.

How To Identify Hidden Causes Of Your Stress

Hidden Picture Games

Identifying the hidden causes of stress is much like playing a hidden picture game in a children's magazine. Remember these games?

Here's how they usually went:

1. The game consisted of a complex picture that had many hidden objects embedded within it.
2. There was a list of hidden objects located below the picture:
“Find the cow, pitch fork, farmer's hat, etc...”
3. As you studied the picture, sometimes rotating the magazine in different ways, you would suddenly spot a hidden object.
4. The moment you spotted it, you could tell it had been there all along; you just hadn't noticed it.

This is exactly what it's like to search for (and eventually locate) the **hidden causes of your stress**.

Once you know what to look for, it's just a matter of time until you'll begin to see these causes more clearly. And when you do, you'll notice they too have been there all along.

Hidden Causes Are Not Complex

The majority of **hidden causes of stress** are not very difficult to understand. As I mentioned earlier, you don't have to be a psychologist, psychiatrist, or even a high school graduate to comprehend them.

They are usually very simple thought patterns (**conversations**) or very basic behavior patterns (**action patterns**), including actions we take and actions we fail to take.

However, just like playing a hidden picture game, it helps to know, in advance, which specific causes you are looking for before beginning your search.

In the next few discussions, I'll introduce you to some of these common hidden causes. Once you see them, you'll immediately appreciate how **simple** they are.

Remember, the difficulty with identifying hidden causes is not that they are complex or mysterious. Rather it's that they exist **within us**. This makes them harder for us to recognize than the more obvious external causes, which are usually clearly evident to all.

Good/Bad Thinking

As I previously mentioned, one big category of hidden causes of stress is our tendency to think in **Either/Or** terms.

There are many variations of this common way of thinking, and several of them play an important role in generating our stress, especially our negative emotions.

One specific example is **Good/Bad thinking**—where things happen, and we automatically judge them to be either “good” or “bad.”

For example:

- Traffic jams are “bad.” Courteous drivers are “good.”
- Getting a “C” on a midterm exam is “bad.” Getting an “A” is “good.”
- When a friend or teacher criticizes me, that’s “bad.” When a friend or teacher compliments me, that’s “good.”

Either/Or thinking causes problems in our lives because it creates multiple false dichotomies that we tend to mistake for truths.

In other words, our thinking (and perceiving) automatically gets stuck in just one side of an Either/Or dichotomy, and we don’t appreciate additional aspects of reality that may belong to the other side.

Example: Your Car is Stolen

Consider the following example:

You wake up one morning and discover that your car (or your computer, or cell phone, etc.) has been stolen.

This sudden, unexpected realization is likely to trigger negative internal conversations in your body, such as:

- “This is **really bad**,” or
- “My plans for today (and future days) are totally **ruined**.”

As a direct result of these automatic conversations, you may immediately experience strong **negative feelings**, such as sadness, anger, anxiety, or worry.

The point of this example isn't to suggest you should consider having your car (or computer or cell phone) stolen a "good" thing.

Rather, it's to highlight how easily we automatically get stuck in just the "bad" side of this one particular Either/Or perspective, which then causes us to react to events exclusively in an **negative way**.

NOTE:

You may have noticed, by now, that I repeatedly say that conversations and action patterns get triggered in our **bodies**, not our minds.

This is not an accident.

There are reasons why I keep making this point, and I will explain these reasons in more detail later on.

Problems with Good/Bad Thinking

Even though **Good/Bad Thinking** is very common, and even though we all engage in it repeatedly, there are several problems with this automatic tendency:

- We generally don't notice that: 1) the events that happen, and 2) our internal assessments of **good** or **bad** are two separate things.
- We tend to be unaware when Good/Bad thinking has automatically taken hold of us.

- We also rarely notice how Good/Bad thinking, and other types of Either/Or thinking, make us **blind** to other perspectives, which could also be valid.
- We end up thinking that whatever happened really **was** good or really **was** bad.
- We end up believing that **goodness** or **badness** are qualities of events themselves—and not internal judgments we (consciously or unconsciously) attach to events.

The Truth about Good and Bad

Few events in life are entirely good or bad. They usually have both good **and** bad aspects to them, depending on what we focus upon. Also, we can choose to respond to most events in life in ways that can produce either positive or negative outcomes (or both).

So, if you automatically tend to focus just on the bad side of this dichotomy, you may become “blind” to **positive aspects** (or potential aspects). And if you automatically tend to focus just on the good side, you may miss **potential risks** or other important **negatives**.

For example, if someone criticizes you and you automatically get stuck in just the negative (i.e. “bad”) viewpoint, you may be missing some of the valuable feedback and/or advice that may have just come your way (the “good” part).

Similarly, getting a “C” on an exam when you were expecting an “A” could be viewed as a “bad” thing. On the other hand, if this causes you to completely reconsider your study approach, and make needed improvements, it could lead you to obtain more A’s later on, not just in that course, but in all your other courses as well.

How Awareness Helps

When you are unaware of hidden causes within you that are producing stress in your life, there's little you can do to combat them.

On the other hand, once you become aware of them, you'll have many new options.

For example, we tend to assume our automatic thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are reliable assessments of the truth about reality (NOTE: This is another very common hidden cause of stress).

When we automatically view something as "bad," for instance, we tend to assume that whatever happened really was bad, and therefore little good can result from it.

This automatic, narrow, one-sided viewpoint can lead to stress in our lives, because reality may be different (and much broader) from what our triggered perspectives reveal.

NOTE: Can you recall instances from your own life, say in the last month or so, where you **automatically** jumped to a conclusion that something happened and it was totally "bad," only to find out later on that it either wasn't all that bad or that something "good" actually came from it? I'll bet you can, if you just look hard enough. Also, can you recall any instances where you automatically thought something was a very good idea, only to find out later that it resulted in some pretty nasty consequences?

Here are two things you can do to help compensate for the drawbacks of automatic Good/Bad thinking, once you become aware that it's been triggered within you:

- 1) Remind yourself that **events** and your **interpretation** of events are two entirely separate things;
- 2) Consciously **choose** how you are going to relate to your situation. In other words, are you going to continue viewing life from your automatic, triggered

perspectives—either “Good” or “Bad”—**once you become aware of them**, or are you going to open your mind to broader, and perhaps more accurate, ways of looking at your situation?

Separate Events and Your Automatic Interpretations

Let’s go back to the example of your car (or computer, or cell phone) being stolen.

Discovering that something valued of yours has been stolen may instantly trigger you to start feeling bad. Why does this happen? Because you automatically judged your situation from a narrow, one-sided **negative perspective**.

Now it may seem to you that the event itself (losing your possession) is inherently bad. But it’s not—it’s just an event. It doesn’t become “bad” until your body adds this interpretation—automatically (i.e. in a knee-jerk type of way). In reality, however, two separate things actually happened:

- 1) The event—losing your car, computer, cell phone, etc.
- 2) Your automatic interpretation that this event was “bad.”

Event: Something of yours was stolen

Interpretation: When you become aware it has been stolen, this knowledge triggered a one-sided, internal conversation, within your body, that the event itself was “bad.”

Once you remind yourself, however, to mentally separate the event (obvious cause) from your automatic interpretation (hidden cause), you are no longer stuck with your negative, one-sided, stress-producing perspective.

You suddenly are freed and can begin to **question its assumed validity**. You also become free to choose other ways of looking at your situation, if you want.

You might even find there are better, more useful ways to look at whatever happened, some of which may make you **feel better** and/or allow you to cope with your situation more easily or creatively.

Choose How You Want To View Events

This is why awareness of your hidden, internal causes is so powerful and stress-relieving. When you become consciously aware that external events and your internal, automatic assessments (such as “good” vs. “bad”) are separate, you don’t have to remain trapped inside your automatic viewpoints (unless you want to).

You can begin to see beyond them, and you are free to consciously decide if you want to continue with them, or not:

Once you remind yourself of this key distinction (events vs. automatic interpretations), here are some of the questions you could be free to explore:

- What if losing your possession isn’t quite as bad as you originally thought?
- Are there any good things that might result from having it stolen?
- Is there a way you could turn this loss into something positive?
- What else could you do to creatively keep this loss from dragging you down (emotionally) and ruining your entire day?

Beyond Good/Bad Thinking

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not suggesting you should view having something of yours stolen as a good thing, nor am I saying it was bad or wrong that you automatically got stuck in a negative perspective.

I am simply pointing out how often we fail to appreciate that our emotional responses to “negative” events in life are caused, in part, **by automatic, internal conversations** that are typically not obvious to us.

Once we **become aware** of these internal conversations, however, including the specific internal “realities” (thoughts, feelings, perceptions we assume to be true), we are then free to discover how often they actually are **misleading, incomplete,** or sometimes even 100% **false**.

Here's A Personal Example:

Many years ago, before I met my wife Christina, I had arranged a first date with a girl I was introduced to. We planned a full day of sailing, with a physician friend of mine and his wife, who owned a nice sailboat which they kept at a marina in Annapolis, Maryland.

Just before leaving my house to pick up my new date, I received an apologetic phone call from my physician friend, saying his boat had been damaged overnight, and he had to cancel out on our trip.

When I arrived at my date's house and gave her the news, both of our initial, knee-jerk reactions were entirely negative: "Oh well, I guess we can't go sailing today."

We were both really bummed out that our planned day of fun on the water was no longer possible, until one of us said "Why don't we just go to the marina anyway, and see if we can find someone else to take us out?"

So we packed lunch for four, headed to the marina, and we eventually met a lovely young couple who agreed to take us out sailing with them for the day. We treated them to lunch, and had a wonderful time sailing.

To this day, every time I see this girl (she ended up marrying one of my best friends from high-school) we remember this day fondly. It clearly didn't turn out to be as "negative" as our initial, automatic, knee-jerk body reactions led us to believe.

Right/Wrong Thinking

Another example of Either/Or Thinking that causes a great deal of stress for human beings is **Right/Wrong** thinking.

Right/Wrong thinking describes our tendency to judge our own or others' behaviors as being either totally "right" or totally "wrong."

NOTE: I'm sure you hardly ever engage in this type of one-sided thinking, especially with regard to your parents. But just in case you do, you might want to pay very close attention to this hidden cause.

KEY POINT:

Throughout human history, many adverse consequences have resulted from Right/Wrong thinking.

Almost every war ever fought came from Right/Wrong thinking.

How about marital problems, divorces, and other interpersonal conflicts?

Right/Wrong thinking is almost always involved.

Again, the main problem with this way of thinking is two-fold:

- 1) We get trapped into thinking that the **truth** about reality really is one-sided, with people being either completely right or completely wrong;
- 2) We are usually not aware that Right/Wrong thinking has taken hold of us.

This makes it difficult to appreciate just how often we automatically:

- draw false conclusions about other people.
- devalue their legitimate opinions or points of view.
- misinterpret their actual motives and intentions.

The Anatomy of An Argument

An argument between two people can be described as follows:

- Two individuals having a passionate discussion, where each believes he/she is **right** and the other is **wrong**.
- The argument is caused when both parties try to convince the other that they alone have the “right” perspective, and the other’s perspective is clearly “wrong.”

Thus, arguments are always rooted in Right/Wrong thinking.

NOTE: Don't Miss Section 4 Of This Book!

Later on in this book, you'll see how both Right/Wrong thinking and Good/Bad thinking are intimately involved as hidden causes of our emotions, especially our **negative emotions**, such as anger, guilt, fear, worry, frustration, and sadness.

I'll also show you a way you can learn how to make most of your negative emotions (and many other types of stress) naturally disappear whenever you want.

You won't want to miss out on this very special opportunity, as it can help you reduce your stress in college and also during the rest of your adult life.

Summary of Key Points So Far

- 1) Most people raised in the United States (and in other industrialized countries) have been culturally conditioned to think in Either/Or ways.
- 2) Automatic habits of thinking, such as Either/Or thinking, can make us blind to aspects of reality that lie outside our narrow, one-sided viewpoints.
- 3) Hidden causes of stress, such as Good/Bad thinking and Right/Wrong thinking are not complex, mysterious, nor are they particularly difficult to understand.
- 4) Hidden causes are not usually not noticed, because they occur within us. Thus, we don't typically appreciate how much they are contributing to our stress.

If you agree with each of the summary points above, congratulations again. You are ready to move on to the next set of concepts.

If you are having trouble agreeing with these summary points, there may be valid reasons. For example, you may have been raised in a family where you were trained to avoid Either/Or thinking. If this is true, I applaud you. Unfortunately, Either/Or thinking is so widespread in the U.S., and in other industrialized nations, that most people find this very hard to avoid.

Or, perhaps the terminology I am using, such as “being blind to certain aspects of reality” is confusing you. I apologize if my language is off-putting. All I'm pointing out is that, as human beings, we all have cognitive and perceptual limitations. In other words, we don't always appreciate all important aspects of reality around us.

Whatever we see, or whatever we choose to focus on, takes our attention away from other parts of reality. Thus, we are always rendered partially “blind” to certain aspects of life, even though we may be able to see many other aspects quite clearly and accurately.

NOTE: One theme I will emphasize throughout this book is that the more blind we are, and the more our automatic perspectives diverge from reality, the more problems (and stress) we will encounter in life. Most people have not been trained to appreciate this point.

One final reason for difficulty embracing the key principles in this book may be that some people are concerned having greater awareness of their internal causes will make them even more “stressed.”

Usually, increased awareness leads to much less stress. But if you haven’t personally experienced this yet, it may be hard to dismiss this concern, until you do.

Expectations

We are now going to look at another very large group of hidden causes of human stress--Expectations.

Sometimes, we are **consciously aware** of our expectations. But much too often, they exist in the **background** of our thinking.

Either way, expectations profoundly color our life, and they strongly influence how we react to everyday situations and events, and therefore how much stress we experience.

KEY POINT:

We have expectations about:

- Ourselves
- Other people
- Life
- Our cars
- Our cell phones
- Our computers
- Our friends
- Many other things

For example, many people have expectations such as:

- “Life should always be fair.”
- “Friends should always be trustworthy.”
- “Teachers should always treat their students with respect.”

When some random tragedy occurs, or if a long-time friend should suddenly betray you, or if a teacher comes down hard on you one day in class, your unseen expectations may automatically kick in and make an unfortunate situation feel even worse.

Tragedies and **betrayals** are very **obvious** to the person who is feeling stressed.

Our own **internal expectations**, on the other hand, are usually **hidden from our view**. This is why the tremendous role that expectations play in causing our stress is frequently missed.

KEY POINT:

Expectations can cause us to experience:

- Emotional distress
- Relationship conflicts
- Communication breakdowns
- School-related stress
- Job-related stress
- And much more

KEY PRINCIPLE:

THE MORE YOU BECOME AWARE OF YOUR HIDDEN EXPECTATIONS, THE MORE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO EXERT CONTROL OVER THEM.

How Do Expectations Causes Stress?

Expectations cause stress in two main ways:

- 1) They are frequently **unrealistic** or **untrue**.
- 2) Most of the time, we are completely **unaware** we have them.

TOO HIGH

For example, when we have **unrealistically high** expectations about ourselves and our abilities, we set ourselves up for failure.

This can lead to frustration, anger, and disappointment.

TOO LOW

When our expectations about ourselves are **unrealistically low**, we may perform way below our true capabilities.

Also, we may fail to act on opportunities when they come our way.

NOTE: In the next few discussions, we'll take a very brief look at how **expectations** play a role in many common types of stress. The purpose of these brief discussions is not to discuss each topic fully, but rather it is merely to show you just **how pervasive expectations are** as hidden causes of human stress.

Emotional Distress

Many of our **negative moods** and **emotions** are tied to our expectations:

- If you frequently expect things won't go your way, you may feel demoralized or depressed.
- If you expect bad things will happen to you in the near future, you will likely feel frightened, anxious or worried.
- When people don't live up to the expectations you have for them, you may feel angry, annoyed, disappointed, or sad.

On the other hand, **positive expectations** can lead to **positive emotions**, such as:

- Optimism
- Enthusiasm
- Confidence
- Contentment

Love

Love is often a mixture of both **positive** and **unrealistic expectations**.

When we fall in love, we are almost always optimistic about the future. We are filled with positive, even euphoric emotions and expectations.

Sometimes these optimistic expectations can be highly unrealistic.

This happens when we confuse being “in love” with knowing what it takes to make a relationship thrive over time.

When the realities of long-term relationships emerge, however, strong initial positive feelings are often not enough to keep the relationship going.

What it does take is:

- Good interpersonal skills
- Good communication skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Partnership-building skills
- And much more

Marital Expectations

Marriage is a hotbed for all sorts of hidden expectations.

Most people have deep-seated ideas about how each partner in a marriage should behave.

Often these expectations are not fully conscious, nor are they acknowledged and communicated between spouses.

When one spouse begins violating the expectations of the other, however, a negative spiral of disappointments, resentments, and retaliations can ensue.

NOTE: In our book, *How To Have A Stress Free Wedding...And Live Happily Ever After*, my wife Christina and I devote an entire chapter to helping engaged couples clarify and then share their expectations with each other **before getting married**.

We include a detailed "Pre-Marital Values, Goals, and Expectations" questionnaire to assist with this process. We also encourage married couples to repeat this exercise every few years, since goals and expectations sometimes change over time.

To find out more and this very powerful and helpful E-book, please visit <http://weddingstressrelief.org> .

Stress at Work or School

Much work-related stress and school-related stress (including college stress) come from five major categories of hidden causes:

- Lack of expertise in handling our emotions
- Communication breakdowns
- Difficulties forming healthy, positive relationships with others
- Negative thinking
- Hidden expectations

In the workplace, for instance, we can have expectations about:

- Vendors
- Suppliers
- Business partners
- Customers
- The economy
- Politicians
- The job market
- Job security

As a college student, you most likely have specific expectations about your teachers, your school administrators, your classmates, your friends, etc.

Thus, both work and school environments can be hotbeds for generating all sorts of hidden expectations.

The Myth of Job Security

Many college graduates (and other people) who enter the workforce have outdated, unrealistic expectations about job security. The most common mistake is assuming that their length of service, or their degree of personal dedication to their employer, will protect them from being let go.

However, when the economy slows down, and money becomes tight, few jobs are really secure.

The Stress of Parenting

Parents (including yours) often have strong expectations about how their kids should think, feel, grow up, and behave.

It's very normal for parents to have such dreams, but it's important for all parents to understand that their children are not always going to comply.

That's not to say parents shouldn't have expectations for their children. Rather, they just need to be more **realistic** about them:

- As parents, we need to be aware that our children are not “bad” or “wrong” if they make different choices, or pursue different life goals, than we might want them to.
- We also need to understand that some of our expectations for our children may come true, but many others probably won't.

Other Parental Expectations

Parents can also have expectations about:

- Their own skills and behaviors as a parent
- Their spouse as a parent
- Their parents or in-laws as grandparents
- Their child's teachers or school officials
- Other people connected with their child's growth and development.

More often than not, these key people also won't live up to our personal standards and expectations. When this happens, parental stress can, and often does, occur.

Travel Stress

Expectations frequently contribute to travel-related stress.

From the moment we begin planning a vacation, or a trip of any kind, we envision the wonderful, positive experiences we will have, including images of joy, peace, adventure, and relaxation.

Unfortunately, the realities of travel often turn out to clash with our idyllic preconceptions.

From the traffic jam on the way to the airport, to having our luggage lost by the airline, to interpersonal conflicts and tensions that develop during our trip, **travel realities** are often very different from our travel-related expectations.

Public Speaking Stress

Much of the stress we experience around public speaking comes from hidden expectations: for example, wanting everyone in the audience to like us or approve of everything we say.

Experienced public speakers know, however, that this is not a realistic goal.

I have learned, over the years, that being a successful public speaker is much easier than I had originally imagined.

Once I discovered some of my own hidden, unrealistic expectations about public speaking, it was easy to recognize where all my stress and anxiety was coming from.

Perfectionist Expectations

Perfectionism includes a group of related expectations. For example, the goal of giving an absolutely perfect speech.

By attempting to accomplish this public speaking goal, people will often worry themselves sick trying to practice and rehearse every detail of their presentation.

This is a waste of time and can actually hinder your performance, making you more likely to make a mistake.

It also tends to deprive you of sleep, which further increases your propensity to make mistakes.

Holiday Stress

Expectations play a major role producing **holiday stress**. This includes both **societal** and **personal** expectations

The holiday season is a happy time for most people, but not for everyone. Yet there's a powerful societal expectation that we should all feel merry during this time of the year.

Because of this expectation, those who aren't in the mood to celebrate are made to feel "abnormal."

If you are single, alone, or recently divorced, for example, social pressures during this time of year can be very stressful.

Similarly, we all have **personal expectations** about how the holidays **should** be celebrated. This includes how our friends and family members should behave during the holiday season. When these personal expectations are not met, stress and relationship conflicts often arise.

Thus, many specific expectations—mostly hidden from our view—come into play as important causes of holiday stress.

Becoming Aware Of Your Hidden Expectations

As you become more aware of any hidden causes of your stress, you will then be in position to **free yourself** from them.

It's that simple. But simple doesn't always mean easy.

It's one thing to become aware of your unconscious expectations. It's quite another to know which ones are realistic and which ones aren't.

This is a big challenge, but it can be met.

Once you become aware of your hidden expectations, for example, you can consciously examine them to determine if they are valid.

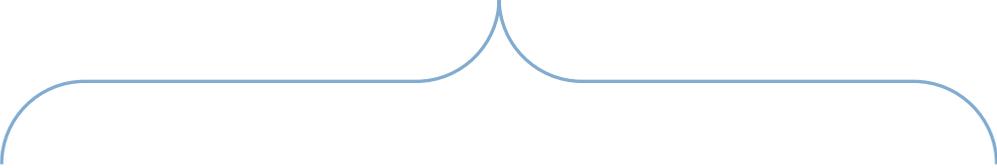
Let's say you notice that you have the expectation "Life should always be fair." Once you become aware of this automatic assumption (expectation), you could stop and ask yourself: "Is this really true?"

Simply by consciously reflecting upon this previously hidden expectation, you may begin to spot flaws in its logic.

The same can be done with many other hidden causes of stress. Take specific types of **Either/Or** thinking, like "Good/Bad" or "Right/Wrong" for instance. What could you do once you become aware that one of these has become triggered within you?

Is it true that whatever happened actually was **bad** or **wrong**?

You'd be surprised how often your thoughts might change, once you ask yourself these very simple "is this really true" questions.



KEY PRINCIPLE:

One way to exercise personal control over your hidden conversations is to ask yourself if something might be **wrong** or **incomplete** with them.

Just by asking this question, you can empower yourself to see things in new, and hopefully more accurate, ways.

The more you do this, the less stress you will have.



Summary of Hidden Conversations

So far in this book, we have covered the following points about the relationship of internal (hidden) conversations to our stress:

- There are many types of hidden conversations that lead to stress for human beings.
- These conversations are endless in number, but some tend to be more common than others.
- Internal, stress-producing conversations are frequently hidden from our view.
- They are also often untrue, unrealistic, or otherwise misleading.

Therefore, whenever you are feeling “stressed” in any way, look for hidden **internal conversations** that might be contributing to your problems.

Remember, the more you learn to recognize these internal, hidden causes, the more **power** and **control** you will be able to exert over them.

How I Think About Stress...Today

At this point, I want to share with you how I now think about stress, and how I think about myself as a human being. Please understand, this is very different from how I thought about stress when I was your age and in college myself. It is also very different from how I thought about stress during my four years of medical school, my three years of internal medicine residency, and my first few years of private practice.

Here's what I believe now:

- The most important thing that makes me human, and separates me from other species, is language.
- Human language is unique among all living creatures—human beings, for example, are the only species that can make and keep a promise. Humans are also capable of judging, evaluating, and otherwise assessing anything that happens to them. We can even imagine future events (and react to those imaginations) even though these events haven't really happened.
- The famous French philosopher Rene Descartes asserted “I think therefore I am”—He was actually wrong about this. He should have said “I speak therefore I am.”
- The term “conversations” is just another way of referring to my internal thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, ideas, attitudes, values, moral judgments, codes of behavior, guiding principles, understandings, preconceptions, theories, opinions, interpretations, assertions, declarations, strategies, personal rules, agreements, promises, commitments, decisions, hopes, goals, etc.
- How I think, perceive, and understand the world around me directly influences how I feel and behave.

- My thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and opinions can be incorrect or misleading from time to time.
- I can be convinced that my thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and opinions are true, even when they are not.
- When I am very attached to an idea I believe in strongly, and when that idea is actually false, it can be very hard for me to admit that I am wrong, especially if I have believed in that idea for a long period of time.
- One way for me to create lots of stress, or problems, in my life is to have incorrect ideas, faulty perceptions, misleading assumptions, and misguided strategies that don't end up getting me what I want.
- As a normal, healthy, intelligent human being, many incorrect ideas, faulty perceptions, misleading assumptions, and misguided strategies get triggered within me (my body) from time to time.
- Much of the stress I experience is caused by false ideas that get triggered within me (my body) and that I often don't recognize.
- Once I become aware of a false idea, incorrect perception, or any other false internal "reality" within me, and once I recognize that it might be contributing to my stress, I immediately have a chance to do something about it. I can look at the idea, belief, perception, etc. and ask myself: "Is this really true or correct?" If I discover it's not, I will have gained new leverage over my stress that I didn't have before.

So far, we've only discussed one major category of hidden causes of stress—**conversations**.

To fully understand how hidden causes lead to stress in human beings, you also need to understand the role that **action patterns** play.

Action Patterns And Human Stress

It's now time to look at the other major category of hidden causes: **Action Patterns**.

ACTION PATTERNS

Action patterns are automatic, habitual behaviors that have become established within our bodies.

Many of these may benefit us, but some can also cause us problems (i.e., stress).

Action patterns include behaviors we perform, as well as those we fail to perform.

As we go through life, many different action patterns get programmed into our bodies.

In childhood and adolescence, these behaviors may have served us well for solving certain problems we faced at the time.

Once these patterns become ingrained within us, however, they tend to get triggered **automatically**, even if they are no longer the most appropriate behaviors for us to engage in.

Learning to Ride a Bicycle

At one point in your life, the action pattern “bicycle riding” was not ingrained in your body. Whenever you got on a bike and tried to ride it, you fell off.

Finally, after a period of trial-and-error learning, something clicked and you were finally able to balance.

At first, you had to consciously think about what to do to stay balanced, but after some additional practice, your balancing skills eventually became ingrained within you.

From that point on, every time you jumped on a bike, the actions required to maintain balance occurred automatically.

In other words, bicycle riding became an **automatic action pattern** that, to this day, remains deeply ingrained within your body.

As adults, we have many ingrained, **automatic action patterns**:

- Jumping reflexively when someone says “Boo!”
- Blushing when someone gives you a compliment, or reveals some secret about you in public.
- Always turning right (or left) at a familiar intersection when driving.
- Always ordering popcorn when going to the movies.

Automatic Eating Behaviors

Many of us, myself included, have automatic eating patterns that cause us to consume more food than our bodies need.

These eating patterns often become established early in childhood. Many were influenced by behaviors within our families or other social groups.

Regardless of how we acquire them, once they become ingrained within our bodies, they continue to get triggered, even if we realize they may not be good for us.

Action Patterns That Cause Stress

There are a large number of action patterns that can cause us to experience stress. For example:

- If you are in a committed relationship, and you are cheating on your partner, you may feel guilty, anxious, or otherwise stressed.
- If you are delinquent paying your debts, you may be constantly hounded by creditors.
- If you habitually turn to alcohol, drugs, food, or sex whenever you become upset, you may never discover that there are better ways to deal with your emotions.

There are many other examples of stress-producing action patterns. Let's take a look at three more very common ones:

- Failing to anticipate breakdowns and delays.
- Failing to ask for help.
- Blaming yourself (or others) when things go wrong.

Failing to Anticipate Breakdowns and Delays

When we are trying to get somewhere in a hurry, or when we are trying to accomplish something promptly, unexpected breakdowns and delays can ruin our plans.

This can be very upsetting.

Yet some breakdowns and delays can be anticipated, and this may afford us opportunities to take steps to avoid them.

The Tight Connection

Imagine you've graduated from college, established your career, got married, and now you're planning a vacation with your spouse. You go online and discover two very attractive discount airline deals to your chosen destination. Both require a connecting flight, but the costs differ.

The cheaper deal has a 30-minute layover between connecting flights, while a slightly more expensive flight has a 2-hour layover. Which one do you choose?

I would choose the more expensive flight. Why? Because when I'm going on vacation, the last thing I want is to feel stressed. That's not my idea of how to begin a relaxing vacation.

For me, the 2-hour layover would be well worth the slightly higher expense. By choosing this flight, I would gain a nice cushion of extra time, where lots of things could go wrong, and my traveling partner and I could still end up OK.

Travelling to the Airport

Whenever you are traveling anywhere by air, if you depart for the airport leaving only enough time to arrive and check-in if everything goes well, you have no cushion for unexpected breakdowns or delays.

What if you get slowed down in traffic, run into a construction zone, or encounter extremely long lines at check-in? You could miss your flight.

These types of delays are common enough that you should be able to anticipate them.

I usually add an additional 30-60 minutes to my estimated travel time to the airport, just in case something unexpected comes up.

Most of the time, I arrive early, which is fine with me.

Another good example of this same stress-producing action pattern (Failing To Anticipate Breakdowns And Delays) is not backing up your computer on a regular basis. Computer breakdowns can and do occur. Your computer also can suddenly become lost or stolen. For as little as \$50 a year, you can subscribe to one of several online backup services, so that even if something disruptive does happen to your computer, you'll be fine (and not nearly as stressed).

Failing to Ask for Help

Another common action pattern that leads to stress is **failing to ask for help**.

As we go through life, we often encounter problems that could be solved or avoided, if we just sought help from others.

Unfortunately, we have many barriers (pride, fear, lack of money, etc.) that keep us from asking for help.

Again, this common action pattern usually goes unrecognized as a primary cause of our stress.

Barriers To Asking For Help

Internal **conversations**, such as:

- “I should solve my problems on my own.”
- “Asking for help is a sign of weakness.”
- “If I ask for help, others might think I’m stupid.”
- “I feel too embarrassed to ask for assistance.”
- “I don’t want to burden other people with my problems.”
- “I asked for help in the past and it didn’t work out.”

Internal **action patterns**, such as:

- Procrastination
- Being unwilling to pay for expert help
- Putting up with unwanted problems
- Not being open to advice from others

Blaming Yourself (Or Others) When Things Go Wrong

Blaming is another common action pattern that causes a great deal of human stress.

Many of us have been programmed to automatically **blame** someone or something whenever things go wrong.

Self Blame and Perfectionism

People who repeatedly blame themselves when things go wrong also tend to suffer from another hidden cause of human stress—**perfectionism**.

Perfectionists tend to have the following types of internal conversations :

- "I should never make a mistake."
- "I should always do things right."
- "I should have known better."
- "Other people should always do things right."

When individuals grow up having these conversations strongly ingrained within them, self-blaming is a natural consequence.

Even though the logic behind perfectionism is terribly flawed, we normally don't notice this when we are in our automatic blaming mode.

Blaming And Cause/Effect Thinking

Blaming behavior is connected to unconscious **Cause/Effect** thinking. In order to have someone or something to blame, we need to have some idea of who or what caused the problem.

Let's take a closer look at how **Cause/Effect** thinking can muddy the waters.

As mentioned earlier, Either/Or ways of thinking lead to very narrow, and often incorrect, notions about life.

With regard to **Cause/Effect** thinking, the most common mistake we automatically make is to focus on just one particular cause in a complex chain of causal events. We then assume this is the only or primary cause.

Cause/Effect thinking says that certain things in life act as "causes" while other things are "effects" of these causes (i.e. not causes themselves). In other words, something is either a cause or it is not a cause.

In reality, however, many additional causes may also be involved.

Automatic Blaming Behavior

As soon as we become aware that something has gone wrong, we tend to automatically focus on who or what to blame.

Most of the time, this is not a conscious decision. We automatically start assigning blame, usually without being aware we are doing so.

BASEBALL NO HITTERS

When a baseball pitcher throws a no-hitter, most of the post-game praise usually goes to the pitcher.

Few applaud the catcher for calling a fabulous game, or the other players who may have made outstanding plays.

Blaming Cholesterol

Another example of how incorrect **Cause/Effect** thinking can become widespread within a society is how most of us have been taught to misunderstand the role of **cholesterol in heart disease**.

If you ask people to name the main cause of heart attacks, most will say it's cholesterol.

Public health officials have taught us to think this way, even though a simplistic Cause/Effect relationship between cholesterol and heart disease is pure fantasy.

Many people who have a heart attack have perfectly normal blood cholesterol levels. Hence, our common sense notion about the role cholesterol plays is quite distorted, yet this doesn't stop us from blaming cholesterol as the primary culprit.

Cholesterol does play a role in causing heart attacks, but it is only one of many causative factors, such as, but not limited to:

- Smoking
- Family history
- Blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Genetics
- Age
- Gender

KEY POINT:

I'm not suggesting you shouldn't be concerned about cholesterol, or that you shouldn't follow your doctor's advice to lower it. I'm just pointing out how easily we can be fooled into thinking that life occurs in nice, neat, simplistic Cause/Effect ways.

Life is usually much more complex. And when we are blind to this complexity, we can end up with very distorted views about causation, which can get us into trouble.

I used to think most of my **Cause/Effect** theories about life were correct.

After all, I'm a trained physician. During my medical school and residency years, I learned to believe in plenty of **Cause/Effect** theories that I thought were very sound.

But as the years went on, I gained a much better appreciation for something the Dean of my medical school warned us about, when he addressed me and all my fellow incoming freshman med students, on the very first day of our journey to becoming physicians.

At the end of his welcoming remarks, he warned us that at least 50% of what we were going to be taught during the next four years in medical school will turn out to be **wrong!**

The only problem, he said, is that he had no idea which 50% this would be.

It's been more than 40 years now since I heard those remarks. And I can honestly tell you...his prediction did come true.

One More Point About Action Patterns

One more thing to remember about “action patterns” is that this term also applies to actions **we don’t take**.

Lack of taking action, when a situation calls for it, can cause just as much stress as when the actions we do engage in get us into trouble.

If you don’t file your income taxes with the IRS, this lack of action can create stress for you later on.

Similarly, if you fail to speak up for yourself when someone is taking advantage of you, the resulting outcome may be distressing.

Many of the action patterns that are frequent causes of our stress turn out to be ones we fail to take, such as:

- Failing to anticipate breakdowns and delays
- Failing to ask for help

Conversations and Action Patterns are Frequently Intertwined

So far, we've examined these two types of hidden causes—**conversations** and **action patterns**—as if they mostly occur in isolation of each other.

However, as we just observed about the connections between **Cause/Effect** thinking and **blaming** behavior, these two types of causes commonly reinforce each other.

Let's take a look at another very common type of stress—mild depression—to gain a better understanding of how specific conversations and action patterns can frequently be intertwined.

RECAP

Hidden causes of stress consist of simple **conversations** such as:

- Good vs. Bad
- Right vs. Wrong
- Cause vs. Effect

and simple **action patterns** such as:

- Failing to anticipate breakdowns and delays
- Failing to ask for help
- Blaming yourself (or others) when things go wrong

How Conversations and Action Patterns Contribute to Some Types Of Mild Depression

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Comments made about depression in this discussion, or elsewhere in this book, may not apply to every depressed individual, nor to all types of depression.

Some forms of depression may be so severe that their causes and treatments may go way beyond simple cognitive or behavioral dynamics.

If you are a person who is struggling with depression, and the following discussion makes you feel worse, please seek help from a qualified mental health professional.

The discussion about mild depression that follows is simply for illustrative purposes—to help you better understand how hidden conversations and action patterns sometimes combine to produce stress. It is not intended to be psychological treatment, nor is it intended to be advice for how to cope with depression.

Mild or occasional depression is a good example of how conversations and action patterns often combine to produce emotional difficulties. Depressed individuals often have many negative thoughts and beliefs, such as:

- "I'm not good enough."
- "I'm never going to amount to anything."
- "Nobody cares about me."
- "Things are never going to get better."
- "I have no future."
- "Maybe it would be best if I were dead."

Most of the time, these thoughts have little or nothing to do with reality.

But it may be difficult for a depressed individual to see that their thoughts may not be reality-based. One reason for this difficulty is that depressed individuals often tend to **act in ways** that reinforce their negative viewpoints.

For example, depressed individuals often:

- Fail to confront their problems optimistically.
- Spend much of their time feeling sorry for themselves.
- Judge past events and behaviors negatively.
- Look at their future possibilities in a pessimistic light.

Mild or occasional depression is not caused just by external situations or events in a person's life, no matter how bad these might be. It is also usually caused by non-obvious factors, such as hidden conversations and action patterns, that occur within the depressed individual.

As they get more and more immersed in these non-productive action patterns, depressed individuals tend to accumulate more and more “evidence” that their negative thought patterns really are true.

The result is a vicious circle, where negative thoughts beget negative behaviors, which in turn beget more negative thoughts, etc. And all of this generates very strong negative feelings of sadness, shame, guilt, and hopelessness.

Additional Comments About Depression

- Some forms of depression may be associated with chemical changes in the brain.
- In most cases, it is not known which comes first: the chemical changes that cause negative thoughts, or repeated negative thoughts that slowly change brain chemistry.
- Research has shown that cognitive/behavioral therapies can help many depressed individuals to recognize and overcome distorted thoughts and behavior patterns that contribute to their depression.
- Drug therapies (or other treatment approaches) may be necessary for some people with depression, but research has also shown that the benefits of cognitive/behavioral therapy can result in improvements equal to antidepressant drugs in some instances. Of course, the more severe the depressive symptoms are, the more drug therapy or other types of therapies may be needed.

Conversations and Action Patterns Are Not Always Hidden

The conversations and action patterns I refer to as “hidden causes” of stress in this book are not always completely hidden from our view. Sometimes they can be readily apparent to us.

For example, depressed individuals may be very aware of their negative thoughts and their pessimistic viewpoints.

What they may not be aware of, however, is how distorted and untrue some of their negative thoughts are. They may also be unaware of the role such untrue thoughts play in causing their depression, or at the very least, making it worse.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

ONE OF THE SECRETS TO DEALING WITH STRESS SUCCESSFULLY IS KNOWING HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUTHS ABOUT LIFE AND ANY DISTORTED OR INCORRECT VIEWS YOU MIGHT HAVE.

**THIS ONE KEY PRINCIPLE
PLAYS A PROMINENT ROLE
IN MOST TYPES OF STRESS WE EXPERIENCE.**

Review of Basic Concepts

You now have been trained to understand some of the basic concepts of what I call a new and improved way of thinking about stress.

- Stress is just a word.
- Stress is a word that stands for **problems** in our lives.
- All problems have specific **causes**.
- The causes of human problems come in two varieties: **obvious** and **non-obvious** causes.
- **Obvious** causes are readily apparent (i.e. almost everyone sees them).
- **Non-obvious** causes include **conversations** and **action patterns** that occur within our bodies.
- Conversations and action patterns often get triggered **automatically** by specific circumstances and events.
- When conversations and action patterns become triggered within us, we often don't see them contributing to our problems (i.e. they are **hidden causes** of stress).
- Even though we don't see them very easily, these hidden causes really are there, and they really do cause a significant amount of stress in our lives.

- While many of our conversations and action patterns may be good for us, some can also make us **blind** to specific truths about life.
- When we are blind to important truths about life, we can end up with problems and hence become “**stressed.**”
- Conversations and action patterns can contribute to our stress individually, or they can combine to cause stress in our lives.
- Once we become consciously aware of any hidden conversations or action patterns that are contributing to our stress, we are then in position to do something about them.
- One thing we can always do is ask ourselves “is this conversation really true?” or “is this behavior really going to be good for me?”
- When we remain unaware of our hidden causes, however, we may continue to suffer their consequences. This may cause us to falsely conclude that stress is an inevitable part of life, and we can never be free of it.
- The best way to deal with stress is **not to manage its symptoms**, but to deal with its underlying causes.
- The first step in doing this is to learn how to recognize both the obvious and non-obvious causes of any stressful problem that is bothering you.

These basic concepts probably differ significantly from what you’ve been taught to believe about stress.

But they are the real deal....and you are now fully aware of them.

A New Foundation

These basic concepts can provide you with a new foundation for understanding human stress and for learning how to deal with it, long after you graduate from college.

For example, with a bit of additional training, you can build upon these basic concepts to learn how to:

- Make **negative emotions**, such as anger, guilt, fear, worry, sadness, and frustration, naturally disappear whenever you want.
- Prevent or eliminate many **relationship** problems or conflicts.
- Deal more effectively with stress at **school** or at **work**.
- Deal more effectively other types of stress, such as the stress of public speaking, stress associated with major life changes, dealing with illness in a loved one, dealing with holiday stress, etc.

Your ability to master each of these (and other) types of stress in your life...depends upon how skillful you are at properly identifying the hidden causes of each specific problem you encounter.

Hidden Causes Of Anger

I'm now going to show you how to make use of the knowledge foundation you've gained so far from this book to better understand what is really going on whenever you feel angry.

You're are about to learn a very easy and powerful way to always know the hidden causes of anger, whenever this emotion gets triggered within you. Please pay close attention, because this valuable information can serve you well, right now, and all throughout your life.

Once you know how to pinpoint **both** the obvious and hidden causes of your feelings of anger, you will then be in position to do something about them. You can even eventually learn how to make anger quickly and easily disappear....whenever you want....without using cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, food, relaxation, physical exercise, or any type of stress management technique.

NOTE: I will only be teaching you how to identify the hidden causes of anger in this book. While this information alone is very useful, I will not be able to teach you here all the “ins and outs” of how to make anger quickly disappear, as this requires more detailed training. I will, however, tell you how you can get your hands on this type of training, if you are interested in doing so, in Section 4.

Also, while I am going to focus only on the specific emotion of ANGER in this book, the same general principles apply to identifying the hidden causes of all other emotions as well.

Remember, the main determinant of your ability to master any stressful problem in your life boils down to two key skills:

- 1) The ability to specifically pinpoint all of the major causes—including hidden causes, which are not always in clear view;
- 2) The ability to know what to do about those causes, especially the hidden ones, once you correctly identify them.

If you like what you learn about the hidden causes of anger in this last part of Section 3, please understand that you can learn to do the very same thing with other negative emotions, such as guilt, frustration, fear, worry, and sadness.

You can also use the same basic approach to learning how to recognize, and then deal with, the hidden causes of many other types of stress in your life, such as:

- Relationship and social stress
- Stress in your future job or career
- Stress in your marriage
- Stress in raising kids of your own
- Stress related to illness in a loved one
- Stress related to illness in yourself
- Stress associated with public speaking
- Stress associated with major life tragedies or changes
- Stress associated with lack of money
- And much, much more.

The knowledge you will need in order to know how to master each of these problem areas is not contained in this book. It is available to you, however, if you know where to look for it, or if you know how to recognize it when it comes your way. I do make some of this knowledge available to people through my blog (www.docorman.com), through my free email newsletter, and through various educational programs that are offered through my Stress Mastery Academy. You may also find other credible sources where this type of information can be easily obtained.

Proven Concepts And Coping Strategies

The specific method for identifying (and remembering) the hidden causes of anger that I am about to share with you is one that I've used successfully in my own life for more than 30 years. I've also successfully taught this method for pinpointing the hidden causes of anger to thousands of other individuals, including:

- Doctors
- Lawyers
- Nurses
- Medical students
- Business executives
- College students
- College athletic coaches
- And even the FBI.

So the method does work, and there is much you can personally gain from it.

Let's start off by considering a few basic principles about human emotions in general.

Triggers and Causes

All human emotions have both triggers and causes:

- **Triggers** are events that activate causes.
- **Causes** determine which particular emotion occurs.

Causes are specific **conversations** and **action patterns** within us.

Triggers and Causes

Say a friend steals money from you one day. When you learn about this, you feel angry. The event—friend stealing money—was the **trigger** (or obvious cause) for your emotional reaction.

But obvious causes are only part of the story. By themselves, they can't make anger or any other emotion occur.

Invisible (Hidden) Internal Causes

Imagine you're sitting in front of a desktop or laptop computer. You've just pressed the letter "A" key on your keyboard, and the letter "A" immediately appears on your monitor screen.

What caused this to occur? Pressing the "A" key, right?

Not exactly.

Pressing the "A" key was just the **triggering event**. A software **program** also had to be running in the background.

This invisible software (word-processing program and operating system) is the internal cause of whatever letters or other images appear on your monitor screen.

Even though these software programs aren't visible to you, they have to be there. Otherwise, the letter "A" would never have appeared on your monitor screen.

Human Emotions Have Invisible Causes Too

When events **trigger** emotions within us, there's always a specific emotion-causing "program" running in the background (i.e. in our bodies). These programs consist of specific conversations and action patterns that get triggered within us in response to different triggering events.

Unfortunately, we have not been taught to understand our emotions in this way.

Even worse, we've been repeatedly taught to believe that **events** themselves directly cause our emotions to occur. This, in my opinion, is another huge way in which both our public and private education systems are failing us today.

Specific Emotions Always Have Specific Causes

The interesting thing about hidden causes of emotions is they are **exactly the same** for all human beings.

For example, the specific conversations and action patterns that cause **anger** to occur for **you** make up the same invisible “program” that causes anger to occur for human beings all over the globe.

This means that if someone in China becomes angry, or another person in Africa becomes angry, both are thinking and perceiving (at a very basic level) in exactly the same ways.

And if someone in America gets angry, regardless of the triggering event, the same set of internal conversations and action patterns must have been triggered within them as well.



Once you learn to recognize the hidden conversations and action patterns that produce anger in one human being, you will also understand what causes anger to occur in all human beings.

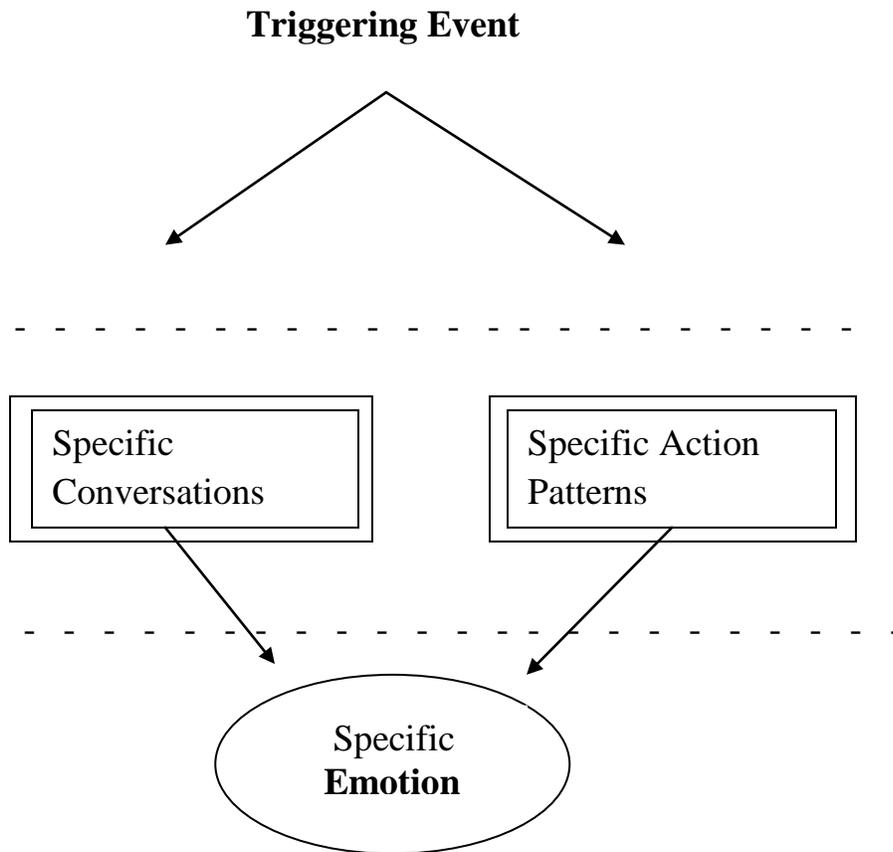


More importantly, every time you become angry, you'll immediately know the specific ways you must be **thinking, perceiving, and acting** in order for you to be experiencing this particular emotion (and not any other one).



A New Model for Understanding Your Emotions

Here's a simple model for understanding how human emotions occur:



Both the **triggering event** and the **emotion** you feel are obvious components of your experience. However, if these are the only puzzle pieces you notice, you can't truly understand what's causing you to feel the way you do. But when you learn to recognize the **additional hidden causes** of your emotions, then you get a more accurate and more complete picture what is really going on.

KEY PRINCIPLE: We react emotionally to particular events not solely because of the event itself, but because specific conversations and action patterns become triggered within us.

Therefore, if you are feeling any particular emotion, a specific set of conversations and action patterns **must have been triggered within you**. The only question is: Do you know which ones?

The Index Card Technique

I am now going to introduce you to a very powerful tool for recognizing (and always remembering) the hidden causes of your emotions.

I call this tool The Index Card Technique.

Here's how it works:

1. Identify the hidden conversations and action patterns responsible for any particular emotion.
2. Write these causes down on an index card.
3. Carry the card with you, or keep it handy.
4. Whenever you experience that emotion, take out your card and review its contents.

If you are feeling that particular emotion, always assume the conversations and action patterns written on your card **must** have been triggered within you, whether you are aware of them or not.

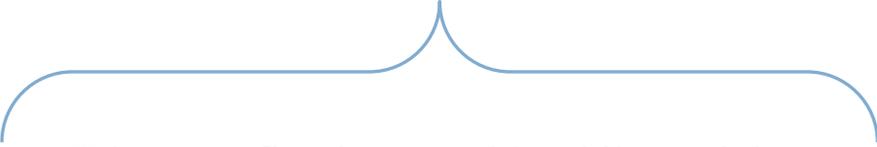
KEY POINT:

Obviously, it might not always be practical to whip out your index card the moment you feel a strong emotion, such as anger. But try reviewing things later on, when you are away from the situation.

See if you can confirm you were thinking and acting in exactly the ways written on your card.

Conceptual “Training Wheels”

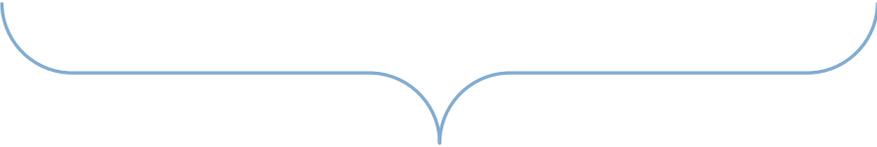
Think of your index card for Anger, that we will build together in a few moments, like training wheels on a bicycle.



When you first learn to ride a bike, training wheels can be helpful until the correct balancing behaviors become ingrained within you.

Once this occurs, you can take off the training wheels and put them away.

The index card for Anger that you will gain from this book works exactly the same way.



Many people have successfully used this Anger index card to train themselves to better understand the hidden causes of this very common emotion.

And just like with training wheels on a bike, once you practice with your Anger card for a while, you won't need to refer to it anymore, as the knowledge it contains will eventually become ingrained within you.

Index Cards Won't Eliminate Your Emotions

It's very important to understand, right from the start, that the Index Card Technique is only designed to help you **recognize** the hidden causes of your emotions.

It is not a technique for **getting rid of** your anger or any other negative emotion.

You can, however, use this technique, along with other coping strategies you can learn about in more advanced trainings, to make your negative emotions **lessen** or even completely **disappear**, once they've become triggered within you.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

Improving your ability to recognize the hidden causes of any type of "stress" is just the **first step** in learning how to eliminate it.

Once you have all the main causes (or puzzle pieces) in front of you—both the obvious and the hidden ones— you will then be able to apply other coping strategies to deal with these causes effectively.

KEY POINT: If you practice with the Anger index card that you will gain from this book, you will quickly improve your ability to recognize the hidden causes of your anger. Once you know how to do this, you will probably be able to modify some of your anger, entirely on your own—just by having this previously hidden information now in plain sight.

Building Your Index Card For Anger (Part 1)

Let's now begin to build your index card for Anger.

Anger-Producing Conversations

Here are **four conversations** that must be present in the background of your thinking/perceiving in order for the emotion of anger to occur:

1. Someone did something they shouldn't have done.
2. Someone was hurt, harmed, humiliated, embarrassed, offended, disappointed, or otherwise inconvenienced by what was done.
3. Some person or persons (other than myself) were unilaterally responsible (i.e. to blame) for #1 and #2.
4. The offending person or persons should acknowledge what they did wrong, offer to make amends, and/or be punished.

NOTE: For conversation #1, you could also be angry at yourself, at a pet, at any other living creature, or even at an inanimate object, such as your car, your computer, or the hammer that somehow just struck your finger. If this is the case, simply adjust the above conversations accordingly.

Let's now look at each of these conversations in more detail.

Conversation 1: Someone Did Something They Shouldn't Have Done

Whenever we feel angry, we've concluded that someone did something **bad** or **wrong**—i.e., something they shouldn't have done.

Example:

Consider our earlier example: A friend steals money from you. When you find out about this, you immediately become angry.

Why did you get angry?

Answer:

Puzzle piece #1—Your friend stole money from you (**obvious cause** or **triggering event**).

Puzzle piece #2—You automatically judged this behavior to be bad or wrong (**hidden cause**).

Conversation 2: Someone Was Hurt, Harmed, etc., by What Was Done

Whenever we feel angry, we also believe that someone (ourselves or others) was hurt, harmed, humiliated, embarrassed, offended, disappointed, or otherwise inconvenienced by what was done.

In other words, we must perceive (or imagine) that some major **negative impact** directly resulted from the **bad** or **wrong** behavior.

If we believe little or no harm or negative impact occurred, we don't usually get angry, even if someone did something they shouldn't have done.

Example:

You're in a grocery store one day, and you witness a mother shopping with her young child. The child makes a fuss, and the mother angrily reacts by slapping the child very hard.

You immediately feel angry. Why?

Answer:

Puzzle piece #1—The mother hit her child very hard for some trivial misbehavior (**obvious cause** or **triggering event**)

Puzzle piece #2—You automatically judged the mother's behavior to be bad or wrong (**first hidden cause**).

Puzzle piece #3—you also automatically concluded that the child suffered hurt or harm—hurt in the immediate sense of physical pain, and possible harm in the longer sense due to potential psychological damage, especially if this maternal behavior continues, as it might (**second hidden cause**).

Let's now look at this same example from the mother's perspective, and see if we can understand (not necessarily forgive or condone) why she got so angry with her child.

Why did the mother become angry in this example?

Answer (Mother's Anger):

Puzzle piece #1—The child became very fussy (**obvious cause** or **triggering event**).

Puzzle piece #2—The mother judged her child's behavior to be very bad or wrong.

Puzzle piece #3—The mother judged that she was being negatively impacted as a direct result of the child's "misbehavior."

*Note: We can't know the exact thoughts or perceptions going on in the mind of another person. But we can be sure that if a person does become angry, some perception of immediate or future **negative impact** must have become triggered within them.*

KEY POINT:

Notice that the hidden causes of your own anger, from just witnessing such an event, are **exactly the same** hidden causes (generically) that provoked the mother to become angry at her child.

This is a good illustration of the principle that the hidden causes of emotions are the same for all human beings.

Why People Have Different Emotional Reactions to the Same Event

If you understand the first two conversations that cause anger to occur for human beings, you should also understand why different people can have vastly different emotional reactions to the same event.

It all has to do with the **internal judgments, evaluations and perceptions** (i.e. conversations) that get triggered within each individual.

In the 1491 Example (to the right), the same event witnessed by two different people, living centuries apart, produced two completely different emotional reactions.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

How we react to events in life all boils down to **what gets triggered within us**—and this key dynamic is almost always hidden from everyone's view.

1491 Example

If you were alive in 1491 and observed a boat carrying people on it disappear over the horizon, you would likely be overcome by strong feelings of sadness, grief, and horror.

Why? Because the prevailing conversations at that time were “the world is flat” and “if you go over the edge, you die.” In 1491, those would have been the likely conversations triggered within your body by witnessing such an event.

Today, we see boats disappear over the horizon all the time, yet no strong emotions occur within us. Why? Because the prevailing conversations in our time are that “the world is round” and that disappearing over the horizon simply means you just “disappeared from view.”

Conversation 3: Someone Was Unilaterally to Blame

Simply judging something to be bad or wrong, and to have produced hurt, harm, or other negative impact, are not enough, by themselves, to produce the emotion of anger.

We also need to identify the responsible **agent**. This is required because we need to know where to direct our anger.

In other words, we need to know **who** or **what** to be angry about (i.e., to blame).

Unilateral Blame

We've been culturally conditioned to view blame from an Either/Or perspective—innocent vs. blame.

This means we tend to look for a primary causal agent, and then we assign most or all of the blame to it, while all other participants or factors are judged to be innocent.

This type of internal conversation is called **unilateral blame**, since it tends to be exclusively one-sided most of the time.

Anger and Blame

Whenever we perceive something bad or wrong that results in hurt or harm, we will automatically seek to assign blame.

Examples:

Take the two examples we've already considered:

- A) In the first example (friend stealing money from you), your friend is perceived to be unilaterally to blame for his or her actions.

After all, you didn't have anything to do with this person deciding to steal money from you.

- B) In the second example, the mother was clearly to blame for hitting her child.

Even though you clearly observed that the child's behavior also played a role, you still tended to lay the majority of blame upon just the mother.

Three Primary Anger Conversations

These first three conversations which we have just discussed are the **primary conversations** that cause anger to occur in human beings:

Anger-Producing Conversations

1. Someone did something they shouldn't have done.
2. Someone was hurt, harmed, etc., by what was done.
3. Some person or persons (other than myself) were unilaterally responsible (i.e. to blame) for #1 and #2.

If any event triggers all three of these internal conversations within us, the emotion of anger will follow.

On the other hand, if only one or two of these conversations get triggered (but not all three), it is unlikely that anger will occur.

Conversation 4: The Offenders Should Acknowledge What They Did Wrong, Offer to Make Amends, and/or Be Punished

This fourth conversation is not a primary anger-producing conversation.

It is a “bonus” conversation that is prevalent in our society and that intensifies anger in certain situations.

QUESTION: Have you ever noticed what happens when someone does something bad or wrong that caused hurt or harm to another, and the person was clearly to blame for their actions, and then, when confronted, that person refuses to admit it?

Your anger gets worse, doesn't it?

This happens because we live in a society where our **expectation** is that people should acknowledge what they do wrong, especially when their wrongdoings negatively impact others. We also expect them to make amends and/or be punished for their behavior.

When these social expectations are not fulfilled, our anger becomes intensified.

Why Anger Intensifies

If we expect a person to admit their wrongdoings and they refuse, isn't this just another instance of them doing something bad or wrong? And isn't that person totally to blame for their refusal? And might we be disappointed, offended, or otherwise negatively impacted?

Thus, the 4th conversation is just a repeat of the first three primary anger-producing conversations. Therefore, it follows logically that our anger would intensify.

KEY POINT:

While the conversations "program" that produces anger in human beings is exactly the same for all of us, there is great variability in the events that **trigger** these internal conversations.

There is also variability in how emotions such as anger are felt and expressed by different people.

For example, people have different standards for judging behaviors or events as being bad or wrong.

Also, some people are highly in touch with their emotions, while others may suppress feelings of anger, or not feel much at all, even when they have been triggered to become angry inside, as can be measured physiologically.

The Front Side of Your Anger Card

You now know the 4 conversations that cause anger to occur in all human beings. This means you are now ready to create the front side of your Anger Index Card.

Building Your Anger Index Card

Print out this page and then cut and paste (or tape) the information below to a 3x5 index card. Alternatively, you could handwrite the information on a blank index card.

ANGER

CONVERSATIONS:

- 1) Someone did something they shouldn't have done.
- 2) Someone was hurt, harmed, humiliated, embarrassed, offended, disappointed, or otherwise inconvenienced by what was done.
- 3) Some person or persons (other than myself) were unilaterally responsible (to blame) for #1 and #2.
- 4) The offending person or persons should acknowledge what they did wrong, offer to make amends, and/or be punished.

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Congratulations! You are now halfway done creating your Anger index card.

Next, we'll fill in the back side of the card (Action Patterns).

Building Your Card For Anger (Part 2)

Anger-Producing Action Patterns

Here are the hidden action patterns that either cause anger to occur or keep it from resolving quickly:

Anger-Producing Action Patterns

- A) Failing to recognize how your own judgments, evaluations, and standards might not be valid for other people.
- B) Failing to recognize how your own actions, past and present, may have contributed to what happened.
- C) Justifying your anger, instead of looking within yourself for its internal causes.
- D) Retaliating or seeking revenge, instead of openly and honestly dealing with what happened.

Conversations and action patterns can mutually reinforce one another. So sometimes, action patterns may play a primary role in causing our emotions to occur.

In general, however, conversations are more involved in the generation of our emotions, whereas action patterns often kick in later, either to intensify the emotion or keep it from quickly resolving.

Let's now examine each of the anger-producing action patterns listed above in more detail.

Anger-Producing Action Patterns

- A) Failing to recognize how your own judgments, evaluations, and standards might not be valid for other people.

Often, we will judge other people's behaviors to be bad or wrong, based on our own **personal standards**, without being aware we are doing so.

This gives us the illusion that whatever happened “really was bad” or “really was wrong,” instead of the event being one thing and our automatic judgments being quite another.

People Behaving “Badly”

When you consciously remind yourself that what other people do—and your judgments about their actions—are two different things, the next logical question becomes “...on what basis did I arrive at my conclusion?”

Often, the honest answer is you referenced your own personal standards for how you **expect** or **believe** people should behave.

Much of this judging activity goes on automatically, beyond our conscious awareness. This means we are usually unaware that:

- We are actively judging other's behaviors to be bad or wrong.
- We are doing so based on personal standards that may not be valid for others.

Are Our Personal Standards Valid For Others?

Was what the person did that triggered your anger inherently bad or wrong?

Or was it just different from how you would do things?

Ask yourself this question a few times, and you may begin to see just how misguided your automatic judgments can be.

Holiday Stress

When two people get married, each brings a different a family history and set of holiday traditions to the union.

During the holiday season, clashes can occur because each spouse may have different expectations about how to “correctly” celebrate. Each may judge the actions of the other negatively, based upon their own past experiences, preferences, and personal standards.

But are one spouse’s preferences really **right** and the other’s **wrong**? Usually, both are equally valid.

Anger-Producing Action Patterns

- B) Failing to recognize how your own actions, past and present, may have contributed to what happened.

This action pattern is related to our automatic conversations of unilateral blame.

As we've previously seen, this type of Either/Or thinking about blame frequently results in incorrect perceptions about what really happened.

When we automatically view other people as being unilaterally to blame, we often fail to recognize how our own actions, past and present, might have contributed to what happened.

Example: Misplaced Blame

A friend starts acting nasty towards you for no apparent reason.

You judge this behavior to be **bad** and **wrong** and begin to feel angry. You also judge your friend to be **unilaterally to blame** for behaving inappropriately.

But what if you did something days earlier that offended your friend?

Perhaps you didn't realize your friend felt offended by something you did or didn't do. So while it may have initially appeared you were completely innocent in the matter, the truth may sometimes be otherwise.

Anger-Producing Action Patterns

- C) Justifying your anger instead of looking within yourself for its internal causes.

As a result of doing seminars for thousands of individuals, I occasionally meet people who are highly attached to their anger.

These people are quick to justify their anger, and defend the “validity” of their personal evaluations and perceptions that fuel it.

Such individuals find it very difficult to look at, and accept, their own role in causing their anger to occur.

They also feel threatened by anything that might lessen their anger or cast doubt on the importance they have assigned to it, and usually to all of their other emotions.

If you tend to be a person who justifies your anger, and if you share similar concerns, please be reassured.

Nothing in this method will take any of your emotions away from you.

On the other hand, if you want to get rid of any negative emotions that might be bothering you, this approach will give you insights and tools that can enable you to do so...but only when you choose.

Anger-Producing Action Patterns

D) Retaliating or seeking revenge, instead of openly and honestly dealing with what happened.

Another action pattern that keeps anger from resolving is retaliating or seeking revenge. This is tied to the 4th anger-producing conversation we examined earlier.

When we perceive others to have done something bad or wrong, and they don't own up to it, we may want to punish them, or otherwise seek revenge.

To the other person, however, our retaliation seems like something bad and wrong that we are now doing. So they get triggered to punish us in return. This vicious circle can go on for some time, until one or the other party ceases to participate.

NOTE:

While we are busy seeking revenge, we are also engaged in justifying our anger and failing to look at how our own actions (or misperceptions) might have contributed to what happened.

Thus, the first **three** action patterns all feed in to produce this fourth one.

TIP: Rent the movie “Tin Men” starring Richard Dreyfus and Danny DeVito. Set in Baltimore in the 1960’s, this story is about two strangers, both of whom happen to be aluminum siding salesmen, who collide one day in a minor car accident. As you watch this humorous tale of escalating revenge-seeking behavior, notice how the entire script for this movie was taken from the conversations and action patterns listed on your anger index card.

Completing Your Anger Index Card

You are now ready to complete your index card for Anger.

When you add the anger-producing Action Patterns to the back of your card, your Anger index card will be complete.

Print out this page and then cut and paste (or tape) the information below to the back of your 3x5 Anger index card. Alternatively, you could handwrite the information on the back of your index card.

ANGER

ACTION PATTERNS:

- A) Failing to recognize how your own judgments, evaluations and standards might not be valid for other people.
- B) Failing to recognize how your own actions, past and present, may have contributed to what happened.
- C) Justifying your anger, instead of looking within yourself for its internal causes.
- D) Retaliating or seeking revenge, instead of openly and honestly dealing with what happened.

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Congratulations! You have now created a complete index card for Anger.

This Card Works....Every Time!

Remember, if you're feeling angry at any time, for any reason, you must be thinking and often behaving in exactly the ways listed on your Anger index card.

I have personally tested this Anger card thousands of times, both in my own life and in my work with other people.

And I have never found it to fail.

For example, whenever I am feeling angry, it always turns out that I am automatically thinking, perceiving, and often behaving in precisely the ways listed on my Anger index card.

No MysteryAnymore!

You now have a fool-proof way to always be able to identify the hidden causes of anger.

Once you know what these hidden causes are, you will then be in position to make your anger quickly disappear, whenever you want (however, you may need some additional training to be able to do this consistently).

KEY POINT:

Once you do learn how to make anger quickly disappear, you'll discover the process is essentially the same for all other negative emotions.

You should also be aware that this process is basically the same for any other type of "stress" you might experience.

Once you can pinpoint all the hidden causes of any stressful problem, you will then see new opportunities for solving or eliminating the problem, that you didn't see before.

Section 4: You Can Learn To Win Against Stress

In this final Section, I will give you some additional advice for learning how to win against stress.

So far, you've gained new insights about many aspects of human stress. For example, you now know:

- ✓ What stress really is--it's just a **word** we use to stand for many different **problems** in our life;
- ✓ Where stress really comes from--it comes from a combination of **external** events and **internal** conversations and action patterns that get triggered inside our bodies;
- ✓ What our best option is for reducing or eliminating it--learn to recognize and then deal with the internal **conversations** and **action patterns** that may be causing our stress to occur, or may be keeping it from resolving.

You've also seen a number of examples of hidden conversations and action patterns and how they can lead to stress. And you've been briefly introduced to an age-old, three-step coping method, which I call **The Ultimate Method For Dealing With Stress**, and which I believe is far superior to stress management.

You've even seen how you can take advantage of these new understandings to build a complete index card that reveals the main hidden causes for one very specific type of human stress (Anger), so you can always remember these hidden causes, whenever this common emotion gets triggered within you.

You've Come A Long Way

You've come a long way since you first began reading this book. Now, it's time to consider taking your new understanding to an even higher level.

It's one thing to know this new information about what stress is and what really causes it to occur. It's quite another, however, to know how to use this perspective to make specific types of stress in your life lessen or completely disappear.

It's also one thing to know **about** the Ultimate Method For Dealing With Stress, and it's quite another to know how to use this coping method correctly and consistently.

I can teach you how to do all of these things, but I can't do it in an introductory level book such as this. You'll need some additional training, which I can show you how to obtain. I'll tell you more about this in just a few moments.

The Ultimate Method Isn't As Easy As It Looks

I may have given you the impression that the three-step Ultimate Method is a simple coping method that's easy to use. Well, it is pretty simple, in that it only requires three basic steps. But "simple" and "easy" are two entirely different things.

In truth, there is nothing easy about knowing how to use this Ultimate Method successfully. That's because if you look at it closely, you will see it's **entirely open-ended**.

It doesn't tell you precisely what to think or specifically what to do. All it does is point you in certain directions. It helps you to focus your thinking and pursue a general coping strategy, but it never tells you exactly what will work.

In this book, I've only addressed a portion of this coping method. I've mainly focused on just the **second step**—how to correctly understand the causes of human stress—and I've said only a few things about the first step (clarifying your problems specifically). In addition, I've said almost nothing about the third step in the method--how to make your stress quickly disappear, once you correctly identify its key hidden causes.

I didn't try to address these two steps in the Method for two reasons:

1. The **biggest challenge** most people face in using this Ultimate Method is shifting their focus from external (obvious) causes, to being willing to **look inside themselves** to identify other important causes. Since this is the biggest psychological barrier most people have to overcome, I chose to devote most of my teaching efforts in this book to addressing this major issue as strongly, and as convincingly, as I could.
2. The second reason is that both the first and the third steps in the Ultimate Method require much more training that can't be adequately conveyed in this type of introductory format.

Now, you don't necessarily need any additional training to start benefitting from this book right away.

In my experience, when people are willing to change (and improve) their whole way of thinking about stress, and when they begin to recognize some of the **internal causes** that may be producing stressful problems in their lives, many are able to pick up the ball and run with it themselves.

Once they start seeing some of the missing puzzle pieces that have been repeatedly causing stress in their lives, they immediately start to see solutions for how to overcome these previously hidden causes.

You may want to try this out yourself, just by using your new Anger index card a few times. I'll bet with just the information on this card alone, without any more training or coaching from me, you'll be able to figure out how to combat some of these hidden causes of anger, on your own. And you may well find that your anger will lessen, or in some cases even completely disappear, as a consequence.

The same goes for some of the other hidden causes of human stress that I described and illustrated for you in Section 3 of this book. Just from being more aware of these hidden causes, and from being better able to recognize them when they get triggered within you, your ability to deal with many types of stress in your life may already be significantly improved.

I'm talking about very **common hidden causes** of stress, that you'll have numerous opportunities to recognize within yourself, such as:

- ✓ Either/Or Thinking (in general)
- ✓ Right/Wrong Thinking
- ✓ Good/Bad Thinking
- ✓ Expectations
- ✓ Negative Thinking
- ✓ Cause/Effect Thinking
- ✓ Credit/Blame Thinking
- ✓ Unilateral Blame Thinking
- ✓ Perfectionism
- ✓ Control
- ✓ My thoughts are always accurate and represent truths about life
- ✓ My feelings are always accurate and represent truths about life

If you'll just take the time to look for these (and other) common hidden causes of stress, you'll spot them frequently. And once you see that they really are contributing to your stress, just this realization alone may lead you to quickly figure out how to make needed corrections.

Trust Me, You Can Do This!

I know that despite everything I said so far, you still may find it hard to believe that you really can learn how to win against stress.

I know you can do this because I've learned how to win against stress myself, and because I'm no more special, talented, or intelligent than you are. I also know you can do this because I've spent the past 30 years successfully teaching these stress mastery skills to others.

There Are No Quick Fixes, However

If you want to master stress in your life, you can learn to do this.

However, it's not going to happen overnight.

It's going to require a re-education process, and this will necessarily take a bit of dedication and commitment on your part. You can't rush it, just because you may be feeling stressed right now, and you want immediate relief.

Changing life-long beliefs about stress (and about life in general) takes time. So does learning how to deploy new coping strategies successfully.

Next Steps

Fortunately, I've spent the past 30 years of my own life learning how to recognize and deal with most of these common hidden causes.

Here are two steps you should take right away, and both of them are totally free:

- 1) Go to <http://ormanstressrelief.com> and sign up to receive my free monthly email newsletter.

Benefit to you: This newsletter focuses on **one key hidden cause** of stress each month. You will also receive weekly emails between issues that will further clarify how that featured hidden cause can produce stress in your life.

- 2) While you are at my website and blog, also sign up to receive a weekly digest of my Monday, Wednesday, and Friday blog posts, which will be automatically sent to you via email every Sunday.

Benefit to you: This is a very convenient way to keep up with my weekly blog posts, without having to remember to come back and visit the site. It also ensures that you won't miss any posts.

I trust you've enjoyed reading this book and learning about a whole new way of thinking about stress. Hopefully some of the new perspectives I have shared with you here will make a difference for you, both in your college life, and in all your future years, once you graduate.

About Doc Orman

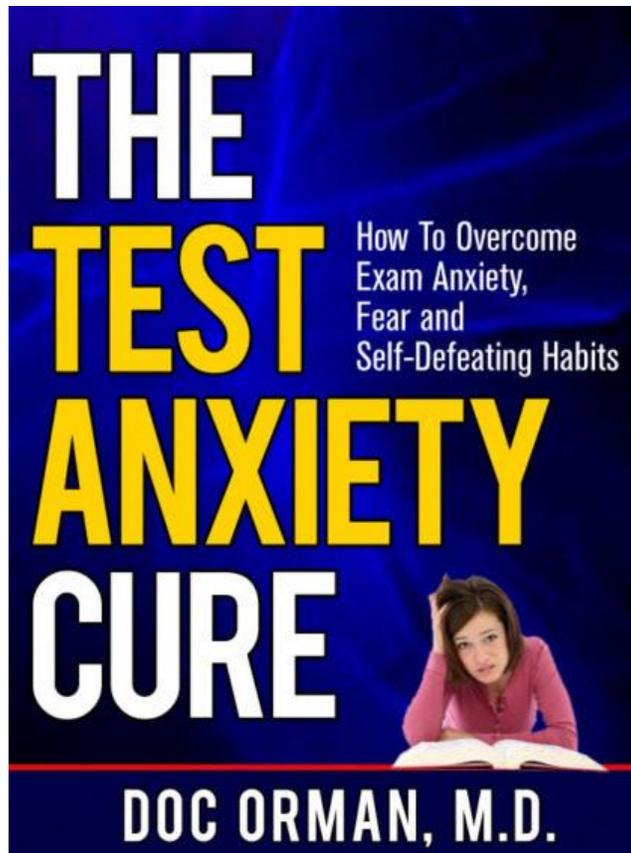
Mort (Doc) Orman, M.D. is a Board-certified Internal Medicine physician who has been helping people learn how to eliminate stress—without having to manage it—since 1981.

He is a graduate of Duke University (B.A. 1969) and the University of Maryland Medical School (1973).

He is Founder and President of the Health Resource Network, Inc., a non-profit health education organization that has sponsored National Stress Awareness month (April) each year since 1992. He is also a co-founder of the Society for Professional Well-Being, a national association for the prevention of stress in physicians and other health care professionals.

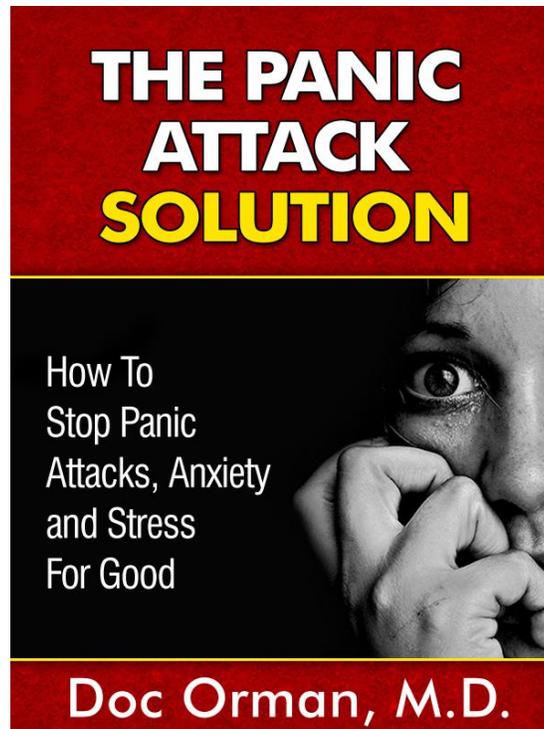
Doc Orman has lectured widely about stress for both health professionals and the public. He has also written numerous books and articles about human stress, including an award winning book, *The 14 Day Stress Cure*, which received a top non-fiction book-of-the-year award (1992) from the National Association of Independent Publishers.

In this book, and in all of the other programs offered through his Stress Mastery Academy, Doc Orman shares many of the insights and coping strategies he uses in his own life and that have helped thousands of people deal with stress more effectively.



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Learn how to apply the some of the general principles you learned from this book to solving your problems with test anxiety. To check out Doc Orman's Kindle book on this topic, just click the link above.



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