

Stress Management & Resilience



Beenleigh
PET HOSPITAL

Woodridge
VET SURGERY

25th August 2016

Further Resources:
www.HighPerformanceVets.com/Aussiepaws

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The logo for High Performance Vets, featuring a stylized orange stethoscope icon to the right of the text "High Performance Vets" in blue and orange font. Below the text is the tagline "Your path to a successful veterinary career" in green.
High Performance Vets
Your path to a successful veterinary career

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About Dr Natasha Wilks & High Performance Vets

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Natasha Wilks is a veterinarian with over 15 years experience in large and small animal practice working in Australia and the UK.

Natasha graduated from the University of Queensland in 1999 and started work in central Queensland in a very busy small animal practice. She then moved to the Gold Coast and in 2004 she headed to the UK to work for a group of very busy practices for 2 years, where she gained a tremendous amount of experience.

In 2006, Natasha returned to Australia and spent time in an Equine practice before leaving to start her coach training and coaching practice, Vibrant Life Coaching.

Natasha completed her Life & Executive Coaching Diploma in 2007 and worked with various people from business owners, mothers and executives.

High Performance Vets was created in 2011 when Natasha returned to veterinary practice after taking time off to raise her young family. She recognised the issues that veterinarians were struggling with could be overcome with the knowledge she gained in her coach training.

Since then Natasha has been working with veterinarians to help them succeed in their career by creating career plans, identify their strengths, learning to understand and communicate with clients and increase their income.

Natasha is passionate about increasing the Social & Emotional Intelligence of veterinarians and improving their well-being by implementing Positive Psychology principles, improving self awareness and reduction and management of stress in practice.

Natasha completed a Certificate in Social + Emotional Intelligence Coaching in 2014.

Natasha has been a presenter at the AVAPM conference in 2013, 2014, 2015, the Pan Pacific Veterinary Conference in 2015, the AVA Conference in 2016, the Brisbane Practitioners Conference in 2015 and will present at the Australian Sheep Vets Conference and the AVBA conference in 2016.

She has written articles for the February and March 2015 editions of the AVJ, AVBA In The Black Magazine and VetAnswers Fat D, Dental Purple Paper, in both 2013, 2014 and 2015.

Natasha is a contributing author to the VetCoach 8th Edition book.

She has presented webinars for The Webinar Vet Australia and Veterinary Classrooms since 2012.

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Introduction

Veterinary teams are exposed to various challenges on a daily basis. The modern workplace is becoming more frantic and overwhelming. Demanding clients, difficult cases, a challenging workload, personal doubts and frustrations can lead to chronic stress which can wear even the strongest person down.

Why Is Resilience Important?

Resilience is an important skill so you can cope with challenges and recover from adversity. The ability to manage and control your reactions to stressful situations and learn from them, allows you to grow and develop better skills. Staying positive and engaged in the long term will help you to enjoy your veterinary career.

People who lack resilience are more reactive and emotional in challenging situations. They don't cope well when exposed to change and challenges and they focus on the problem rather than working towards a solution. They can become reactive, pessimistic, feel hopeless and disengaged. In the workplace a lack of resilience reduces performance, affects team dynamics, interferes with relationships and it can lead to career derailment.

What Is Resilience

Resilience is the ability to overcome obstacles, recover from setbacks, bounce back from adversity and reach out for help.

Resilience has 8 components:

- Emotional Regulation - the ability to stay calm under pressure and control your attention, emotions and behaviour
- Empathy - the awareness of the feelings and emotions of another person
- Self Efficacy - your belief in your ability to succeed and accomplish tasks
- Realistic Optimism - being able to look at the positives of life while having a realistic viewpoint
- Causal Analysis - to accurately identify the causes of problems
- Impulse Control - being able to control the desire for immediate gratification
- Reaching Out - asking for assistance

How to Increase Your Resilience

Resilience is an emotional intelligence competency and skill that can be developed. Being aware of what is causing you stress, managing your energy so you can cope better with stress and changing your response to challenging situations will increase your resilience.

The focus for this workshop is on 3 following areas

1. **Deplete** - what depletes you and reduces your capacity & wellbeing
2. **Replenish** - what you must do to return to your set level of wellbeing
3. **Strengthen** - building personal resources and skills to increase your level of wellbeing

DEplete

It is of critical importance to develop self-awareness. This allows you to recognise your individual stressors which contribute to chronic stress. Self-awareness also helps you to identify if you are experiencing any of the signs or symptoms associated with compassion fatigue and/or burnout.

Stress in Practice

Understand Yourself & Your Environment to Manage Your Stress

What is Stress?

Stress is anything that knocks us out of homeostatic balance as defined by Robert Sapolsky, a world renowned expert in stress.

Homeostasis is our ideal state. Your ideal body temperature, ideal glucose level, ideal blood stream, ideal everything! You feel good, calm and are in a relaxed state.

When was the last time you actually experienced that state though?

We need some stress as it moves us towards peak performance. Stress becomes damaging when our body doesn't switch off to the stressor/s.

In the wild, if an animal perceives danger or sees a predator, it will activate its 'fight or flight' response. This allows the animal to quickly run and escape from the danger. Once it is safe, it becomes calm and its body returns to normal.

For people, we are activating our 'fight or flight' stress response often but it usually isn't life threatening situations. It can be activated on Monday morning with the thought of going to work, getting the kids organised, the drive to work, waiting in line or dealing with someone who is rude.

The problem that develops is there can be many incidents during the day which turn on your stress response and/or you can't return to a calm state as you may be ruminating over what occurred. This is when stress becomes harmful to our bodies.

It is important to recognise that it isn't the event itself which causes the stress. It is our perception and interpretation of the event which leads to the stress response.

What is a Stressor?

A stressor is anything that causes your body to leave homeostasis, which is the calm and relaxed state.

David Posen MD, a doctor who specialises in stress, has found there are external and internal stressors or triggers.

External:

1. Physical or environmental
2. Social (interaction with people)
3. Organisational
4. Major life events
5. Daily hassles

Internal:

1. Lifestyle choices
2. Self talk
3. Interpretation of events
4. Mind traps
5. Belief systems
6. Stress prone personalities

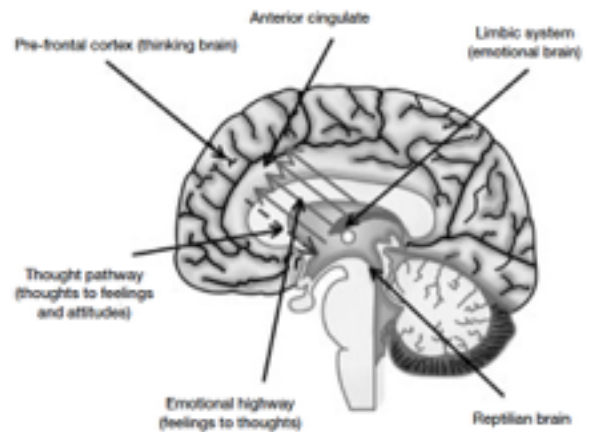


Figure 1.1 The triune brain

How does a stressor affect the body?

The Limbic system in our brain, contains the Amygdala which is the emotional centre of the brain. It communicates with the rest of the body.

The Amygdala is activated when a stressor is **perceived**. The amygdala sends a signal to the autonomic nervous system. There are two branches to the autonomic nervous system.

- the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is the accelerator for the stress response. It creates the flight or fight response. This results in the body becoming activated, increased heart rate, increased respiratory rate, flushed face and slowing of digestion.
- the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) is the brake. It helps us calm down , restore and refresh.

When a stressor is perceived, the SNS is activated. The PNS turns off the SNS so you can refuel, restore and relax.

Resilience is learning how to turn off the SNS by activating the PNS.

Stressors are cumulative. The more life changes or daily hassles you are dealing with the more intense the symptoms of stress.

The Pre-frontal cortex or frontal lobe is the thinking brain and is responsible for good decision making, weighing consequences of actions and rational thought.

There is an established neural pathway from the Limbic system (emotional brain) to the Pre-frontal cortex (PFC - thinking brain). However, the neural pathway from the emotional brain has more connections and is like a highway to the PFC whereas the pathway from the PFC to the Limbic system resembles a dirt track.

This is why it is important to build awareness of your emotions as you will be receiving a lot more information to your PFC than you realise. If you don't pay attention, your body does with headaches, fatigue, illness, sore muscles, stomach aches plus more.

Just by thinking about a perceived stress will activate your stress response. This is why it is very important to be aware of your mindset and thought patterns.

Fear is one of the greatest stressors of all time

Chronic stress occurs when you are unable to turn off the SNS either by the inability to activate the PNS or by continuous stressors.

Chronic stress or secondary stress doesn't go away and it produces a wear and tear on our minds, body and behaviour.

Stress and Performance



The Yerkes - Dodson Curve shows our relationship with stress and performance. Some stress is good to reach our optimal performance and this is referred to as eustress.

Eustress is defined as stress that is healthy, or gives one a feeling of fulfilment or other positive feelings. Eustress is a process of exploring potential gains. Eustress is good stress. With stress being a response to an external stimulus, eustress is the feeling you get when you are overcome with the excitement and anticipation of a desired outcome. Eustress moves you from the left side of the curve to the centre.

Distress is when you tip over the edge to the right side of the curve.

What does Chronic Stress do to your body?

In our modern lives it has been found that we have layer upon layer of stress. People may have job stress and money stress and parenting stress and relationship stress and dietary stress and sleep deprivation stress plus the acute stress that occurs every day.

What occurs is the layers of stress occur in small increments that people don't even realise they have been living with extreme stress for so long and they don't even recognise that they are stressed.

When stress activates the amygdala, which activates the Autonomic Nervous System, adrenaline and cortisol is released and oxytocin, oestrogen, testosterone are also involved.

The Physical Effects of Chronic Stress

- **Cardiovascular effects:** increased heart rate, blood vessels constrict which makes it harder for the heart to pump, increased blood pressure and increased cholesterol leading to plaque build up on the arteries
- **The Brain:** cortisol attacks neurons in the hippocampus and shrinks the neuron and reduces neuronal connections which affects short term memory and learning as well as retrieving long term memories. It also shortens the telomeres on our DNA which contribute to increased ageing.
- **Digestive System:** inhibit digestion and increase stomach acid production. Prolonged stress irritates the large intestines. It can also affect absorption of nutrients from your intestines.
- **The Immune System:** your immunity is reduced therefore you are more likely to become ill. There is evidence that you can develop a hyperactive immune system which increases your risk of autoimmune diseases.
- **Adrenal Fatigue:** the adrenal glands become fatigued with the constant demand.

The Psychological Effects of Chronic Stress

- Serotonin is reduced and you become more prone to anger and aggression. Sleep habits and appetite are affected by serotonin.
- You have a narrower vision so you don't become aware of options and choices and become more pessimistic.
- People may feel numb as they stop becoming aware of what is happening in their body.

The Behavioural Effects of Chronic Stress

- neglect of healthy lifestyle practices
- always busy
- anxiety
- sleep deprivation
- substances abuse as a way of coping

EXERCISE:

What are your triggers for stress?

- Personally
- Professionally
- Financially
- Your environment

How do you react?

- Internally
- Externally
- Who is affected?

Look for a pattern. Do you always respond a certain way with a similar emotion?

You must become aware of the impact of your reactions on others and how it affects them. Is your reaction to stress causing stress in others? If so, what can you do differently?

Understanding How Others React to Stress

One person's stress is another person's challenge.

Teams who are the most productive, work together well in good times and in challenging times. It is important to recognise that not everyone has developed appropriate coping strategies for stress and they may consider stressful what you do not. It is important to be aware of stress in others and be empathetic.

Mindset

How Do You Think, Feel & Behave?

Once you recognise which situations trigger you, it is important to write them down and start to identify what occurs within yourself. You will have a pattern of responding, cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally and it's essential to identify this.

It is critical to determine what you are thinking and identify if these thoughts are resourceful or contributing to stress.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the event?
- What are my thoughts?
- How does that make me feel?
- How do I behave?

Ask Yourself Is It True?

When you are triggered by an event, identify your thoughts and ask 'It is true?'. For example, if you are cut off in traffic and your first thought is that the person is selfish, rude and doesn't care about anyone, ask yourself is that true? Could it be that the person didn't see you or they are dealing with an emergency?

Asking yourself this question, helps to challenge the current belief you have about the situation or person. It can then reduce the intensity of the emotional response you will have. This is important in situations where you believe something negative about yourself in response to a situation. By asking the question, you can stop a pattern of emotional response that previously, may have a negative outcome for yourself.

The Perfectionist Curse

As high achievers, a lot of veterinarians have perfectionist tendencies. Aiming for perfection is the path to frustration and dissatisfaction as it is never achieved in the individual's mind as the standards set are so high. Perfectionism is not the same as striving for excellence which is aiming for continual improvement and growth. Perfectionism is holding yourself to such high standards because of a fear of making mistakes, failure and negative judgements. It is also a need for safety, approval and a sense of adequacy, driven by a belief system that tells the individual they're not good enough, don't have enough or haven't achieved enough.

From Kelly Exeter's book, Practical Perfection, there are 3 types of perfectionism:

1. **Self-orientated perfectionists** adhere to strict standards while maintaining strong motivation to attain perfection and avoid failure and engage in strict self-evaluation.
2. **Other-orientated perfectionists** set unrealistic standards for significant others and stringently evaluate others' performances.
3. **Socially-prescribed perfectionists** believe others hold unrealistic expectations for their behaviour and they experience external pressure to be perfect, believing others evaluate them critically.

Perfectionistic tendencies can lead to overwhelm, burnout and being very busy but having low productivity. High achievers are able to bounce back quickly from disappointment while perfectionists tend to beat themselves up much more and wallow in negative feelings.

Thinking Styles That Create and Contribute To Stress

There are certain patterns of thinking that contribute to stress.

1. Jumping to Conclusions

- making assumptions without the relevant data

2. Tunnel Vision

- as your mind is unable to process all the information it is presented with, it takes shortcuts. Tunnel vision is only seeing a certain aspect of a situation and drawing an incorrect conclusion

3. Magnifying and Minimising

- magnifying the negative and minimising the positive leading to a negative mood and compromised resilience
- magnifying the positive and minimising the negative may underestimate the need for change

4. Personalising

- a tendency to attribute problems to one's own doing
- if this is perceived with a lack of control, it leads to passivity and giving up

5. Externalising

- blaming others or external circumstances

6. Overgeneralising

- makes 'always' and 'everything' explanations
- if used with personalising, will assassinate their own character
- if used with externalising, will assassinate the character of others

7. Mind Reading

- believing you know what those around us are thinking
- partnered with jumping to conclusions

It is important to be aware of these thinking styles and if you have a predominant pattern that causes stress. If so, work towards identifying the beliefs that occurred during the adversity or event that lead to your response.

Stress Reduction and Management

Now that you are aware of what stress does to your body, how to recognise it, what your stressors are, we can implement changes to reduce your stress.

There will always be stress in our lives. You have control over your internal factors. You can't control your external factors but you can influence them.

REPLENISH

It is important to take the time every day for activities that replenish you and bring you back to your set level of wellbeing. Without this, you will find your levels of energy, enthusiasm and ability to cope will reduce with time.

Mindset

Aim for Excellence & Mastery NOT Perfection

As high achievers, a lot of veterinarians have perfectionist tendencies. Aiming for perfection is the path to frustration and dissatisfaction as it is never achieved in the individual's mind.

The focus instead should be on working towards excellence and mastery. These have differing outcomes in your satisfaction with the result. You still want to perform and complete the task to the best of your ability but you know that learning and growing is part of the process.

Put it in Perspective

For many people, they dwell on a current adversity and within a few minutes have imagined a chain of disastrous events stretching into the future. Anxiety has evolved to prepare us for a threat but ruminating and worry blows things out of proportion and reduces resilience.

Instead of catastrophising and imaging the worst case scenarios, it is essential to identify when this is occurring and pause. Then by asking yourself how likely is it that this will occur, will help you to recognise you are imagining worst case scenarios. Now considering the best case scenario which will help to move you to a more realistic alternative.

Purpose

Why you do what you do

Knowing your meaning or purpose allows you to recognise why you make the choices you do and what motivates you in your career.

Being aware of your purpose and meaning contributes to your wellbeing and fulfilment, personally and professionally.

EXERCISE:

Write Down Your Why. You may call it your Meaning, Purpose, Why or Calling.

Consider the following questions:

What drives you to get out of bed everyday and come into practice?

What led you to where you are today?

What are you passionate about?

Self Care

The 3 foundations for a healthy fit brain to become resilient and withstand stress is:

1. A minimum of 7-9 hours sleep
2. Exercise at least 5 times per week
3. Healthy nutrition

The three set your brain up for maximal success.

I attended a positive psychology seminar with Paula Robinson who is the expert on Brain fitness. In her opinion, these three are CRITICAL for a healthy, resilient brain. If she can only have two of the three, she will choose sleep and exercise as she can work with a suboptimal diet.

If you can't commit to any of the three, she refuses to work with you!!

Rest & Rejuvenation

Have you ever had a great weekend that was filled with events and fun but when you came back to work on Monday you felt exhausted? While you may have been energised by your activities, you didn't get enough rest and your body was still depleted

How about the holiday where you sat on a beach or by the pool but still felt dull at the end? This is because there wasn't enough rejuvenation.

Veterinary practice is mentally, physically and emotionally taxing. You MUST rest. Being sleep deprived, not taking any breaks or lunch, working excessive hours at a high pace and not taking holidays, increases stress in your body, impacts your memory and results in fatigue, exhaustion and reduced performance.

Olympic athletes train 90% of the time to perform 10% of the time. In the workplace, you are performing 100% of the time. Olympic athletes know to rest so their body recovers and strengthens which allows them to reach peak performance.

The attitude of 'breaks are for wimps' is outdated and harmful.

Rest is essential to recover from the stressors of life and work. Rest is in the form of good sleep, good nutrition and mindfulness to allow both your body to recover and your mind.

Rejuvenation reinvigorates & re-energises you.

Every Day: take 10 minutes to rest & replenish

Every week: do something that rejuvenates you

Every Month: switch off for 24 hours. Unplug, stay off social media & digital technology

Every Quarter: take a mini break

Every Year: you must take holidays every year, at least 2 weeks at a time!

STRENGTHEN

Building personal resources and skills contributes to a higher level of wellbeing and has a protective effect in times of challenge and acute stress.

Positive Psychology

Utilising Your Strengths and Potential to Increase your Wellbeing

What is Positive Psychology?

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning and the psychology of the characteristics, conditions and processes which lead to flourishing.

Positive Psychology is a relatively new area as previously the focus of psychology was on the negative in what was wrong with people. The focus is now shifting to 'what is right' with people.

Why is Positive Psychology important for me?

You cannot reach your full potential if you are focussing on what is wrong with you. You must change the focus to identify your strengths, your innate talents, your capabilities and your characteristics that will enable you to flourish in your life.

Complete mental health is a combination of high emotional wellbeing, high psychological wellbeing, high social wellbeing and low mental illness.

Research by Professor Felicia Huppert indicates there are four scales of mental health functioning:

1. Flourishing
2. Moderate mental health
3. Languishing
4. Mental disorder

Unfortunately, the majority of people are located between moderate mental health and languishing. The issue becomes when dealing with the inevitable adversities that occur in life. The risk is for people who don't have the resilience and coping skills to develop depression, anxiety and other mental health issues.

Paula Robinson from the Positive Psychology Institute in Sydney, is an expert in Brain Fitness. She incorporates the principles of positive psychology to build mental strength and resilience with the goal of moving individuals into flourishing. This is important as it builds reserves. In life, we will experience set backs, tragedies and adversity. Having a reserve will enable you to cope with challenges without slipping into languishing or a mental disorder.

Currently, in my opinion, we don't have many veterinarians, teams or veterinary practices flourishing in their mental health or culture.

The Importance of Your Mindset

Carol Dweck has been researching mindsets for years. Your mindset affects your performance, motivation and wellbeing.

There are two types of mindset:

1. Fixed
 - holds the belief that personal qualities and/or abilities are set
2. Growth
 - holds the belief that personal qualities and abilities can change

Your mindset influences your goals, how you respond to failure, your ability to persevere, the effort to achieve and if you will create solutions to your problems.

Goals

Fixed mindset: will focus on ‘performance’ goals which meet a set criteria to validate their skill or ability. They have black or white thinking e.g. you are clever, capable and talented or not which leads to a winning or losing mindset.

Growth mindset: focus on ‘learning’ goals which is gaining competence in an area and then mastering it. It’s not winning or losing but growth and learning which is their focus.

Responding to Failure

Fixed mindset: failure to achieve goals leads to a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness which affects self confidence and motivation.

Growth mindset: failure isn’t a big deal as the focus is on what the person can learn from the experience to apply next time.

Effort

Fixed mindset: holds the belief that intelligence is only determined by a small amount of effort and if a large amount of effort is needed, then this indicates a lack of talent or ability.

Growth mindset: believes that a larger percentage of effort is needed to achieve success. This is empowering as the focus moves to persistence and refusing to give up when faced with disappointments.

Strategies

Fixed mindset: when faced with a problem, these people usually keep repeating the same behaviour. Rather than change their strategy, they normally give up.

Growth mindset: when experiencing a problem, they will look for new strategies.

It is important to recognise in the various areas of your career and life, where you may have a fixed or growth mindset and how this is affecting your performance.

In the future for yourself and others, is important to focus on praising the effort instead of intelligence or ability.

Remember when learning new skills or breaking old habits, you will need to build new neural pathways and consistent, continued effort is required. The more you do, the more connections will form so practice is very important.

PERMA

Martin Seligman in his book, Flourish, describes his new theory of wellbeing.

Flourishing is a result of wellbeing. Wellbeing is comprised of five elements which he found are essential to wellbeing and need to be experienced on a consistent basis.

PERMA is the acronym for the five elements:

1. Positive Emotion
2. Engagement
3. Positive Relationships
4. Meaning
5. Accomplishment

1. Positive Emotions

How satisfied you are with your life, can depend on the mood you are in. Positive emotions are important to experience well-being. These are pleasure, happiness, contentment, peace, joy and inspiration.

Barbara Fredrickson is the leading researcher in the field of positive emotions. Her 'broaden and build' theory suggests that positive emotions lead to more expansive and creative thoughts and behaviour.

Experiencing positive emotions creates upward spirals of thought and action which prepare you for future challenges. Positive emotions also undo negative emotions by counteracting feelings of stress and negative emotions.

Remember the Losada Ratio of 3:1 minimum.

It is important for you identify if you are experiencing enough positive emotions in your life and career. It is also very important for you to be aware of what activities, people, events and things contribute to you experiencing these emotions.

2. Engagement

Engagement is also referred to as 'flow' or for sports people 'being in the zone'. It is what you experience when you are totally absorbed in a task and you lose track of time.

When you are in flow, you will be using all of your strengths and you will be engaged. It is important to note, that in the moment, you may not be experiencing pleasure and you may not be aware that you are in flow until afterwards e.g. GDV surgery. Flow is beneficial as it produces positive emotions, leads to positive growth, encourages persistence and develops your skills.

This is why it is important to be aware of your strengths as well as your skills and competencies.

FLOW = high challenge + medium to high skill

Anxiety & stress = high challenge + low skill

Boredom & apathy = low challenge + medium to high skill

To reduce anxiety and stress either improve your skills with consistent learning or reduce the challenge. Sometimes, it can be as simple as breaking the task into smaller steps.

To overcome boredom and apathy, it is important to increase the challenge of the task.

3. Positive Relationships

Good, caring and supportive interpersonal connections are essential for well-being and social support is the major predictor of mental health. The desire to feel connected, belonging, to be loved and cared for others and for ourselves is a fundamental human need.

The foundation of any good relationship is communication. How you respond to good news is very important and you should be focussing on an active constructive response style.

For marriages and workplaces, you want to aim for a 5:1 positivity ratio.

Happiness is contagious! Focus on performing acts of kindness to boost your positive emotions and relationships.

4. Meaning

Pursuing meaningful activities has been found to be more strongly related to happiness than pursuing pleasurable ones. Meaning is derived from your sense of purpose for your life and career. Meaning has two functions in our life. To form the bedrock foundation which enables us to become more resilient and bounce back from adversity. It also gives a sense of direction which assists in goal setting.

For your career, meaning can be derived internally from your individual personality characteristics or externally by the specific characteristics of your job. It can also be from the relationship you have to work.

Three dominant relationships have been identified which affect our satisfaction with life and is more important to our well-being than status or earning.

The three types of work relationships are:

- **Job** - work is a means to an end. It provides financial resources for you to enjoy your life outside of work.
- **Career** - you enjoy work and are focussed on promotions and higher levels and the corresponding rewards such as income, social standing, power and self esteem.
- **Calling** - work is the most important part of your life. It is done for the contribution that occurs and personal fulfilment. This contributes to the most satisfaction and well-being

If you are finding that your work isn't meaningful, there are a number of ways that you can reframe your work.

- change the tasks that you do
- change the relationships you have with your colleagues and clients
- change the way you perceive the job (this is within your control)

5. Accomplishment

Accomplishment is considered as achievement, competence and/or success to progress towards goals and mastery at the highest possible level.

Accomplishment can be pursued for its own sake and is intrinsically motivating.

Achievement = skill x effort

Both skill and effort have certain characteristics for higher achievement. These are the speed of thought you have available. If you already have a competency on a certain tasks this allows you to process information faster. Your rate of learning is very important as the faster you learn, the more knowledge you can acquire.

Competence is the result of feeling confident, effective and masterful in what you do. This is why it is important to seek regular positive, constructive feedback about your performance. Also increase your skill set by undertaking specific training and challenging yourself to improve your performance.

EXERCISE:

In each of the first five elements, PERMA, write down which activities contribute to your wellbeing both personally and professionally.

1. **Positive Emotions**

2. **Engagement**

3. **Positive Relationships**

4. **Meaning**

5. **Accomplishment**

Optimism

Optimism is a positive predictor of resilience. Optimism isn't about unjustifiable positivity about the world but through the power of 'non-negative' thinking. It is important to be aware of how you explain good events and bad events to yourself about why they happen.

It is critical that you believe in your professional skills and know that you are capable of handling challenges that occur. With an optimistic explanatory style, setbacks don't become disasters and failure and mistakes are opportunities for learning rather than feeling that whatever you do doesn't matter and wanting to give up or quit.

EXERCISES

The following exercises have been designed to utilise what has been learned in positive psychology to improve your wellbeing. You can do the four exercises or start with one.

1. Gratitude

Gratitude is being thankful and showing appreciation for what you have and/or what you have received. Gratitude is a top character strength which is associated with life satisfaction.

People who are grateful are less anxious, depressed, envious, lonely and materialistic. Being grateful will increase your levels of optimism, joy, interest, enthusiasm, energy and determination.

You can either write in a journal daily or weekly about what you are grateful for. With time, your outlook will shift from what you perceive you lack to the positive and this will counteract the negativity bias.

2. Three Good Things

At the end of the day, write down three good things about the day. This instills a habit of happiness. Due to our brains negatively bias, you are building and strengthen neural pathways of appreciation and increasing your positive emotions.

3. What Went Well

As we have been conditioned to think negatively, we must make a conscious effort to focus on the positive.

This exercise enables you to focus on the things that worked, what you can learn from them and what you can do next time.

Summary

We encounter stress on a daily basis. The key to managing stress is being able to recognise it and reframe it. Distress occurs not from the event but how we perceive it. For the times where stress is unavoidable, it's important that you take the time to rest, recover & rejuvenate.

Positive psychology now has the formula for life long satisfaction and fulfilment. Previously the focus was on happiness but positive psychologists have recognised there is more than happiness that contributes to flourishing.

Instead of focussing on your weaknesses, focus on your strengths, capabilities, skills and talents.

Retrain your brain to become positively focussed and build realistic optimism and resilience into your life.

The great news is that you just need time and effort to consistently do the exercises to change the patterns in your brain.

Every year take time to determine your PERMA and what you need to do and experience on a consistent basis to live a life of flourishing.

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