

Quadrant II Newsletter

Research shows that the difference between leaders who derail in their career and those that soar to great heights is social skills. Social skills appear in the second quadrant of Stephen R. Covey's Importance-Urgency matrix: social skills are important to a career but not urgent (Covey is author of the top-selling business book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*). Quadrant II provides an opportunity for business and technical professionals to learn and try out new social skills based in science.

26Nov2015, author: Valerie Patrick, PhD, *Reducing Stress for Improved Social Interactions*

Quotable (*Key Message*)

Chronic stress may make it harder for you to learn and to have good social interactions.

Quantify (*The Science*)

Madhumita Murgia, Head of Technology for Telegraph Media Group in London, explains the science of how stress affects the brain in a TED Education session (<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-stress-affects-your-brain-madhumita-murgia>). Murgia explains that the Hypothalamus Pituitary Adrenal (HPA) axis is a series of interactions between the endocrine glands in the brain and on the kidneys which control your body's reaction to stress. When the body detects a stressful situation, your HPA Axis is activated which causes the release of the hormone cortisol. Chronic stress or emotional stress can cause high levels of cortisol in the body over long periods of time. High levels of cortisol over long periods of time can shrink your pre-frontal cortex which regulates behaviors like decision-making, concentration, and social interactions. High levels of cortisol can also lead to fewer new brain cells being made in the hippocampus

and deterioration of electric signals in the hippocampus. The hippocampus is the part of the brain associated with learning and memories.

Murgia concludes by identifying two primary ways to reverse what cortisol does to the brain. These two ways are cardiovascular exercise and meditation because both involve deep breathing and awareness of the self. Both of these ways have been shown to decrease stress and increase the size of the hippocampus.

Qualify (*Put into Practice*)

One way to decrease stress is cardiovascular exercise. From the 3rd newsletter, you need to maintain a target heart rate for at least 20 minutes to get cardiovascular exercise. The target heart rate for the aerobic zone is 65 to 85% of your maximum heart rate calculated as 220 minus your age (see <http://www.hanford.gov/health/?page=112>). Some of my favorite forms of aerobic exercise are using an elliptical exercise machine (gentle on the joints), hiking up and down mountains, biking, walking briskly to music in scenic areas, taking a spinning class, and swimming long distances in lakes.

The other way to reduce stress is mindfulness meditation. Check out the free guided meditations for an introduction to mindfulness meditation from the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center here:

<http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>.

Quip (*Fun*)



This picture, from “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off,” shows a student trying to stay awake in a boring class! When we say that decreasing your stress will help you learn, we are not talking about a laid-back approach to learning! You must have the right level of challenge to learn – not so much challenge that you’re overwhelmed but enough

challenge that you’re improving understanding or a skill.

Quest (*Resources*)

Dr. Dr. Valerie Patrick, Founder and President of Fulcrum Connection LLC, provides training, consulting, and keynotes on facilitation, teamwork, collaboration, creativity, innovation, social intelligence, change management, and thriving on a steep learning curve. Contact Dr. Patrick (valerie.patrick@fulcrumconnection.com or text 412-742-9675) to set up an exploratory call.

Read about three approaches to collaboration inspired by user-centered design on the Competent Collaborator Blog here:

<http://fulcrumconnection.com/blog/it-takes-a-team-to-do-user-centered-design/>.

About Fulcrum Connection LLC

Fulcrum Connection specializes in instructional design, training, speaking, facilitation and consulting to develop skills in leadership, innovation, sustainability, troubleshooting teamwork, and managing technical professionals.