The Ultimate Blueprint
Creating Your Stress Management Plan

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Introduction

Someone once described running a business as being the pilot of an aircraft, which is in perpetual flight. If you run a business or are in management, you are one of the crewmembers who keep the plane in the air and moving in a purposeful direction.

If you have ever flown before, you will have experienced being greeted at the door by the air crew and even the pilot or co-pilot, imagine how you would feel if the pilot shook your hand, welcomed you on board and then turned to look into the cockpit and fell on the ground head in hands crying in despair *"look at all those dials what do they mean?"* You probably wouldn't be keen to take your seat and strap yourself in for a flight into the unknown.

Yet for many this is exactly how they pilot their businesses, they either don't have a dashboard with all the required indicators to let them know where they are, how they are performing or where they are going. Or if they do they either don't know how to read them correctly or they are missing one crucial dial, which indicates how their business is performing – "A stress and wellbeing performance indicator."

Most savvy business owners regularly check their dashboard indicators using their cash flow, balance sheets, profit and loss accounts and other Key Performance Indicator (KPI's) such as sales targets, customer renewals, churn etc to keep track of where they are and where they are heading. In over 17 years of business coaching I have yet to meet a single business that has a *"stress and wellbeing performance indicator"* that tells them how their most valuable asset (their human capital) is performing. Stress has a human and financial cost to business performance, it is the flying equivalent of burning valuable fuel you can ill afford to lose and having engines underperforming because they are under strain.

If you want to keep your business flying high you need a plan to deal with stress and keep your assets performing at optimal levels – **welcome to the Ultimate Blueprint - Creating Your Stress Management Plan.**

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In your hands you have a blueprint guide, designed to taking you and your company through a process, with the ultimate aim of enabling you to create your plan for a *"stress free workplace"*. A *"stress free workplace"* may be an impossible expectation to set, but if what you achieve is a *"less stressful workplace"* then that, in and of itself, is a great result. If you want to reach the moon then aim for the stars.

Workplace stress is costing businesses millions yearly and most responsible business owners recognise there is a problem. The challenge many face is to find and implement workable solutions. Creating a suitable strategic plan fit for purpose pre-supposes you know what you want, and you know where to find it and also know how to execute your plan. I have written this e-book specifically to guide you through the steps I would take you through if you were a client who was looking to develop a plan designed specifically for you, your team and your own unique business.

There is no *"one size fits all"* stress management plan that works every time for everyone, simply because all businesses are idiosyncratically unique, The Ultimate Blueprint will take you through a 3-stage process, so you can create your own unique strategic plan that will best fit you and your team needs.

This e-book has been written with a certain group of people in mind, those responsible for the safety and welfare of their employees, it can be used by any sized organisation from 2 to 2000 employees (plus). Whether you are a small business owner, or the HR director of a large organisation, this blueprint guide gives you a working framework specific to your organisation and will point you in the direction of solutions that if you are *willing* to explore will create a less stressful workplace for you and your team.

The word *willing* is an important word here. Having been a coach for over 17 years and coached over 3000 clients face to face, willingness is the first thing I test and explore with all clients to decide if I even want to work with them. I test amongst other things their willingness to honour their word, to follow instructions, to step out of their

comfort zone, to be challenged in beliefs and actions, to exceed their own expectations, to take responsibility and be held accountable for their own actions. Without *willingness* any change work can be a struggle, and is usually ineffective which is why so many strategic plans fail from the start because some people aren't willing to fully engage in their implementation.

Without willingness, getting an individual or organisation to change is like pushing a pea uphill with your nose, and who wants to do that. Two key tests for willingness (individuals, team or organisation) are:

1. Willingness to listen to learn.
2. Willingness to explore and experiment, to try things out and learn from their experience.

Willingness comes down to five simple criteria that affect the effectiveness of any coaching, training and in this case your stress management programme they are:

1. Does someone have the *awareness* that there is a problem or issue that needs to be addressed?
2. Does someone have the *motivation* to do something about addressing the problem or issue?
3. Does someone have the **"know how"***?* Do they know what to do about the problem or issue?
4. Does someone have the *capabilities and skills* to implement the – "know how"?
5. Does someone allow enough *time* for the changes to be implemented?

If a client, team or organisation isn't willing to listen to learn or to explore, experiment, to try things out from their own experiences then they are stuck. We have nowhere to go. All we can have is a nice theoretical conversation but nothing changes, and as far as I'm concerned discussing theory is an activity for down the pub. Coaching and training has only happened when things change, and change doesn't come about by simply discussing who has the best theory without anyone having tested any of them.

If a client isn't *willing* they are often resistant to even becoming aware that there is a problem, they certainly won't become motivated to make any change, they won't try

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new methods or techniques (so they learn new skills) and they certainly won't invest any time in order to make any changes that are lasting. So the first question to ask yourself is "**ARE YOU WILLING?"**

Are you willing to read to learn, willing to explore and experiment? If the answer is yes, read on and as you work through this Ultimate Blueprint guide, you will become aware of problems and solutions related to making any stress management programme effective. You will be motivated to implement changes (and have a greater understanding of how to motivate your peers, colleagues and employees), you will also learn tips, methods and techniques that will reduce stress and create a less stressful environment and you will be willing to allow the time for the changes to settle and become your best practice.
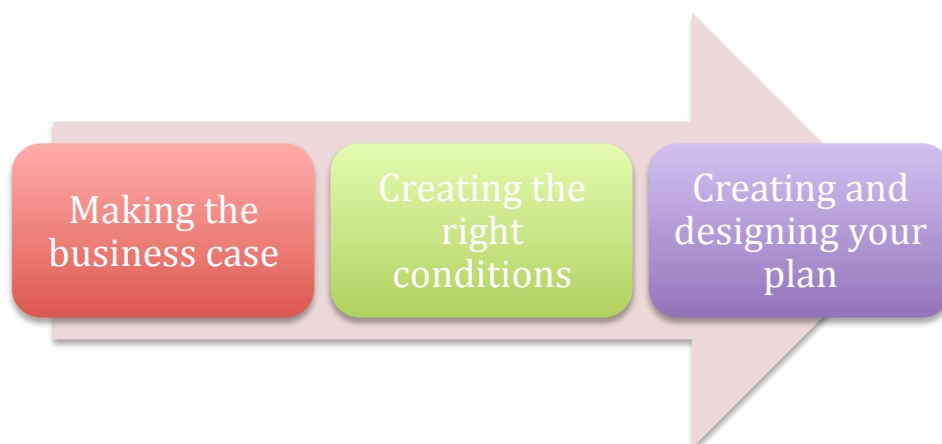
The Ultimate Blueprint for a successful stress management plan has 3 stages, they are:

Stage 1: Identifying the problem and making the business case
Stage 2: Creating the right conditions for effective change to happen.
Stage 3: Creating and designing your plan

Figure 1- The 3 Stages of the Ultimate Blueprint.

Stage 1 – Identifying the problem & making the business case.

This is an important first stage in any change programme, being able to clearly identify a problem brings it into everyone's awareness and helps to engage and motivate people to take action.

You wouldn't be reading this unless you were already aware there was a problem that needs addressing, but when it comes to stress in the workplace many people in positions of power, influence and responsibility don't have that awareness. My experience with working with companies to design and implement stress management plans is that there can be resistance to even admitting there is a problem. In order to implement any plan "stake-holders" need to be aware of the need for a plan and there are common attitudes that need to be overcome before any plan can be made and then implemented.

The first attitude to address is that of **stigma**. There is a stigma around stress that stops people from talking about it and openly admitting they are stressed. The attitudes some people have towards those who are stressed include, *"if you are stressed you are weak or need therapy"* or *"are you not up to your job?"* Thankfully these attitudes are slowly changing, in 2017, 150 organisations in the City of London signed up to the "green ribbon project" declaring they were actively addressing the stigma of stress. Despite initiatives such as this and regular stress related articles appearing in the media, stigma is still far too common an attitude preventing stress being openly discussed as a real issue in many organisations.

As stress becomes more openly discussed and seen not as a sign of weakness but as a natural human response, it will become easier to make a case for resolving the problem that gets listened to and acted upon. Until then, the most effective way to get influencers to listen and take action, is to present a business case for addressing the problem of workplace stress.

The second attitude, which prevents stress from being addressed, is that many know there is a problem; yet don't want to address it for fear of **"opening up a can of worms"**. This is as ridiculous as it sounds as the can of worms is putrefying and will explode at some point if not opened. This attitude ignores a present day problem for a larger problem in the future.

The third attitude is *deniability*. Humans have an amazing capacity to see the facts of a given situation and give them a positive twist, believing they don't relate directly to themselves. A great example of this is cancer. The statistics are that 1 in 2 people born after 1960 in the UK will be diagnosed with some form of cancer during their lifetime. Present these statistics and most people believe it will not happen to them, they refuse to acknowledge the facts relate personally to themselves. I am fortunate, as having been born in 1960 and not after 1960 the statistics obviously don't relate to me (see how easy it is to deny a possibility). Deniability stops people from seeing the problem as being relevant to them personally which blocks them from being motivated to take appropriate actions.

Two ways to address **stigma**, **can of worms** and **deniability,** is to approach these head on and prevent them from being a blind spot for those with these views, and secondly identify the problem of workplace stress in a way that makes it personal and relevant to everyone within an organisation so the problem becomes undeniable.

For most business people that means, showing them how stress in the workplace affects the bottom line – **PROFITS**. Get clarity on exactly what stress is really costing your business, identify and quantify the problem in monetary terms; hard cash and people will make it personal and begin to pay attention.

The three attitudes given above are why the important first stage in creating your stress management programme is to make a sound business case for addressing the problem of stress. To make the business case I have developed a process you can take yourself through for your organisation, it will help you to identify the real financial costs of stress to your business. It will also help you to present your business case for implementing the Ultimate Blueprint if you do have to deal with people with their heads in the sand, that are in denial or simply need to see what their Return On Investment (ROI) will be before taking action.

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Making the problem real and personal

You can quickly calculate the approximate costs of work related stress for your business by considering these four stress costs all of which have been researched and identified as affecting a business financially:

1. **Absenteeism**
2. **Presenteeism**
3. **Cost to turnover and profit**
4. **Failure to take action costs**

1. Absenteeism

Research by the Health & Safety Executive shows that 45% of all working days lost to ill health are stress related. The average cost to business is estimated to be £1350 per employee, however that is an average and when making the business case considering an average isn't as effective as being personal and accurate. Your sick leave records will tell you how much stress is actually costing you in terms of absenteeism. This is the first place most businesses check to calculate the full extent of the problem. However absenteeism is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the total costs.

2. Presenteeism

Presenteeism is the damage caused by someone who is enduring excessive stress, still shows up for work, makes bad decisions, has poor judgment and underperforms. Before finally going absent, most people hang out at work enduring stress and there is a cost for this, which far exceeds the absenteeism costs. Research by the National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) shows that work impaired performance costs business between 2 x to 10 x the cost of Absenteeism. Examples given by NICE for Presenteeism costs include:

- Damage to equipment and production resulting from accidents and mistakes
- Reduced performance/productivity
- Loss of public goodwill
- Brand damage
- Low workplace morale

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Most people are shocked and surprised when they first hear about Presenteeism; but consider a time when you were stressed at work and didn't take sick leave, were you productive? Probably not! The salesman who is stressed rarely performs and delivers to sales targets, the stressed customer service representative can often be brusque or come across as unhelpful and lose a life long customer, the manager who is stressed isn't performing at optimal best during team and management meetings etc. Presenteeism is a hidden cost that when revealed makes a solid case for addressing stress in the workplace.

Most businesses that do consider presenteeism costs have a tendency to deny (deniability yet again!) the research, and will conservatively underestimate the cost of poor performance. In the next section I present an example of how to calculate stress costs for your business. I have been conservative and shown presenteeism as 2 x cost of absenteeism, when you do the calculations for yourself, consider what the costs are if presenteeism costs are 10 x for at least some of your staff.

3. Costs to Turnover & Profit

When someone takes time off work due to stress, is that the full extent of the costs to the business? Far from it! You are still paying for their desk, the phone lines, the office, and their contribution towards generating profits. Time off sick due to stress has costs to your business in terms of overheads (which still have to be covered during absenteeism) and lost profits (the money that wasn't generated while off absent). Not only is money going out but also money isn't come in.

4. Failure to take action costs

If the cost of stress is an unpalatable cake to swallow, here is the sour cherry sitting on the top of the sickly icing. There are additional costs that most businesses fail to consider, and these can be very costly if they do happen.

- **Premature retirement** – Consider the financial cost of replacing an experienced person who retires early and the loss of experience and talent from your business.

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- **Staff replacement costs** – the costs of recruiting, training, down time between finding a replacement are some of the tangible costs, however also take into consideration intangibles such as the loss a member can have on team morale and the affect on a teams performance while a new member is getting up to speed.
- **Grievance and litigation/compensation costs** – this does happen, albeit rarely, however when it does there is an average cost of between £5,000 - £25,000 payout to the aggrieved employee. It is a litigious society and as stress in the workplace becomes more openly discussed a business protecting itself from valid and spurious claims is a serious consideration. In addition consider the time, money and effort involved in defending against a compensation claim.

Here is a simple formula for calculating what the 4 stress costs amount to for your business. If you prefer not to do the calculations manually, then visit my website where you will find a free **stress calculator** which will do the maths for you.

To start your calculations, answer these questions about your business:

1. What are your annual labour costs as a percentage of your annual turn over?
2. What are the average number of days your business loses to Absenteeism each month (all causes)
3. What is your average daily pay rate per employee? You can break this down into different pay brackets for more accuracy.

Here is an example for a fictitious company. Acme Trading has 40 employees and a management team of 5 with 3 directors.

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Table 1. Absenteeism costs

	Employees	Management	Directors
% of labour	25%	25%	25%
Absenteeism in a month	10	3	2
Day rate	£70	£150	£250
Total absenteeism cost	£700	£450	£500
Attributable to stress (45% of total)	£315	£202	£225

Table 2. Presenteeism costs

	Employees	Management	Directors
Attributable to stress (45% of total)	£315	£202	£225
Presenteeism taken as conservative multiple of 2 x Absenteeism	£630	£404	£450

Table 3. Costs to turnover and profit

	Employees	Management	Directors
Attributable to stress (45% of total)	£315	£202	£225
Costs to T/O & Profit - Divide Attributable to stress (row above) by % of labour (first row in table 1) x 100 %	£1260	£808	£900

Table 4. Monthly and annual cost to business of stress.

	Employees	Management	Directors
Absenteeism	£315	£202	£225
Presenteeism	£630	£404	£450
Additional costs	£1260	£808	£900
Total monthly costs	£2205	£1414	£1575
Annual cost	£26,460	£16,968	£18,900

Table 5. Failure to take action costs.

Average recruitment costs	£13,500
Average training costs for replacements	£5,000
Average litigation costs	£5,000 - £25,000

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For Acme Trading their annual cost attributable to work related stress is approximately **£62,328**.**00** plus the possible costs if they fail to take action and lose staff, which could be £**18,500.00** for recruiting and training a replacement for each staff member plus litigation if a compensation claim is made.

Although compensation claims (as mentioned earlier) are rare, in the news recently a UK company paid out £340,000 in compensation to a member of staff who was off sick due to stress. Before judgement the case went before 8 tribunals before a judge passed a verdict in the claimants favour. Never underestimate the costs not only of compensation but legal costs, and the cost to your team in having to deal with a claim.

Get the figures down in a report, make them personal and real and upscale them from monthly to yearly and you will get a realistic view of what workplace stress is actually costing you and your business. In addition to the above – and yes there is more, take into the consideration other costs which are difficult to quantify, yet have a huge negative impact on the performance and productivity of any organisation – the human costs. The human costs include depression, anxiety, dysfunctional habits people use to cope with stress (drinking, drugs, gambling, sex), and the affect it has on the morale of colleagues who are working alongside someone who is struggling to cope.

Identify, quantify and become aware of the problem, this way whether the problem is addressed because of financial motivations or because it's the right thing to do is irrelevant.

Once you have calculated the costs and created a financial business case it's time to look at stage 2 of the Ultimate Blueprint creating the right conditions for planning and change to happen.

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Calculating the real cost of stress to your business.

1. Costs to your company of absenteeism

	Employees	Management	Directors
% of labour			
Absenteeism			
Day rate			
Total absenteeism cost			
Attributable to stress (45% of total)			

2. Costs to your company of presenteeism

	Employees	Management	Directors
Attributable to stress (45% of total)			
Presenteeism taken as conservative multiple of 2 x Absenteeism			

3. Costs to your company turnover and profit due to workplace stress

	Employees	Management	Directors
Attributable to stress (45% of total)			
Costs to T/O & Profit - Divide Attributable to stress (row above) by % of labour (first row in table 1) x 100 %			

4. Monthly and annual cost of stress to your company.

	Employees	Management	Directors
Absenteeism			
Presenteeism			
Additional costs			
Total monthly costs			
Annual cost			

Table 5. Failure to take action costs.

Average recruitment costs	
Average training costs for replacements	
Average litigation costs	

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Stage 2 – Creating the right conditions for planning and changes to happen.

In 2004 the UK - Heath and Safety Executive (HSE) released a set of Management Standards designed to guide organisations through a process with the outcomes of *"creating a safer place of working"* and *"reducing stress in the workplace".* The Management Standards approach deals primarily with identifying the six key factors known to cause stress and addressing company policies and procedures to mitigate stress. The six key factors (or stressors) identified by the HSE that can lead to work related stress if they are not managed properly are:

1. **Demands**: When employees indicate that they are unable to cope with the demands of their jobs.
2. **Control**: When employees indicate that they are unable to have a say about the way they do their work.
3. **Support**: When employees indicate that they receive inadequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors.
4. **Relationships**: When employees indicate that they are subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work.
5. **Role**: When employees indicate that they are unclear or do not understand their role and responsibilities.
6. **Change**: When employees indicate that the organisation fails to engage with them when undergoing an organisational change.

The Management Standards is an excellent initiative, so far so good – but there is a problem. Simply following a process that addresses policies and procedures is not enough. On the HSE website a report in 2016 shows that despite the Management Standards being in place since 2004 and used by many companies "*levels of workplace stress have remained approximately the same for the past 10 years."* Let's just press a pause button for a moment and consider what this means.

Whatever is being done to reduce workplace stress by addressing policies and procedures isn't working.

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Despite a great set of tools being freely available and used (sometimes to good effect), workplace stress is still a problem because any effective blueprint for a stress management plan **has** to be created taking into consideration two mindsets.

Mindsets for a successful stress management plan.

1. The mindset of the organisation implementing the policies and procedural changes. A Healthy Organisation Mindset (HOM) will determine whether you create the right conditions for the right plan to be made, and whether your plan gets implemented effectively or not.

2. The mindset of the individual. A Healthy Individual Mindset (HIM) has a profound effect on how people react, cope and deal with stress.

In my book "*The Wellbeing Formula @ Work*" I address in greater detail both the Healthy Organisation Mindset and a Healthy Individual Mindset where you can learn more about successful coping strategies for dealing with stress. In this e-book I lay out for you a way to address HOM so you can create a plan that will be effective, so when you do address policies and procedures they are more likely to be implemented

I want to make clear that I am not criticising the Management Standards. Addressing policies and procedures is however only one of three parts that creates a *"Wellbeing Sweet Spot";* this is where organisations and individuals with the right mindsets work collaboratively to address stress including amending policies and procedures.

Figure 2- Wellbeing Sweet Spot

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At the end of this e-book you will find links to the HSE Management Standards tools, which are free to use, but before you do so, you need to first address the mindset of your organisation (HOM). At first glance, changing a company mindset may seem an insurmountable task, however it's not if there is enough motivation and the willingness to change. With the HOM in place you will be in a better position to influence and engage key people to create the right conditions so you can create your plan that works for the good of all, with all stake-holders fully invested and committed to making your plan work.

Creating a Healthy Organisation Mindset.

Many organisations that put in place a stress management plan regrettably find that not much changes, as the statistics show. Policies and procedures are changed, and some of the changes are followed and others aren't. Far too often the stress management plan is implemented from top down with little or no consultation with the team and very little *"buy in"* from either management or the staff. Creating a plan and then looking to get *"buy in"* is a flawed strategy.

Let me explain the flaw with this top down strategy with an example. Imagine you are a manager and your company has booked you in for a coaching programme to help you perform better at work. During your session I presented you with solutions for your problems that would transform your performance. Let's assume the coaching has been forced upon you and you are initially unwilling (that word again) to engage in the process. Perhaps you are far too busy doing your day job to take time out, maybe you don't trust the motives behind giving you coaching and feel your ability to do your job is in question and felt threatened by it. What if you were reluctant to talk to your manager about why you were having coaching? Would you be willing to fully engage in the programme? Would you be likely to invest your valuable time and effort in the solutions offered and trying them out until you got results? Probably not! I would have to work really hard as your coach to get you to *"buy into"* your coaching programme.

Forcing a programme of change (even with good intentions) is a common occurrence, which is why any company that I coach must first clearly and honestly discuss with their staff why the coaching has been commissioned and ask their staff if they are willing to undertake the coaching programme.

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Forcing a solution from top down rarely works. If a client is unwilling to be transparent with it's staff about their motives for coaching and if the person being coached isn't willing to engage I will not take that company on as a client.

Now consider another strategy. Imagine that I am asked by a company to run a coaching programme for you, a manager who is struggling and underperforming. The company are required (by me) to have an honest open conversation with you about the need for coaching. Once you have agreed your willingness to make the time and commit to the coaching programme only then will we do any work.

Your coaching programme begins and part of your first session is spent in setting up the right conditions for the coaching to be effective. We create a "*safe space*" where you can be honest, open and vulnerable. We explore your companies motives for commissioning the coaching, you recognise and acknowledge that there is a problem and that you are struggling and underperforming. We then explore alternative ways for you to think and behave and we work collaboratively to come to a solution and create a coaching plan of action. You will have some trust in the plan (after all you helped create it). We discuss what you are honestly capable of doing, taking into account your work load and commitments, so you take responsibility and are willing to be held accountable. Would you be more likely to implement the plan? Probably yes and at no time did you have to "*buy into*" the plan because I didn't have to sell it to you, it was created in collaboration with you.

Creating plans collaboratively is a successful strategy if you want plans to be implemented. Collaborative planning requires all parties involved to have **3 attitudes**, which are the attitudes of a Healthy Organisation Mindset for it to work well.

The 3 attitudes of a Healthy Organisation Mindset are:

1. Rapport
2. Accountability & Responsibility
3. Clarity

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1. Rapport - Is where there is **Trust**, **Respect** and **Honesty** in a relationship**.**

   o Trust knowing that you are all in this business together, with no hidden agendas and a full commitment to support each other for the greater good. *"I have your interests at heart and I know you have mine".*

   o Respect knowing that I will treat you professionally and courteously keeping any criticisms professional and constructive and you will reciprocate.

   o Honesty knowing that we all agree to speak our truth and are willing to contribute without fear of recriminations or judgment.

2. Accountability & Responsibility means if you accept an assigned role or task you do so with full commitment to its outcome and you will have the honesty to say if you can't deliver and why. You also trust that if you accept full accountability and responsibility and encounter problems, they will be looked at from a professional perspective.

3. Clarity about what the problem is and why you are engaged in looking for a solution in the first place. Clarity about what is in it for you and others involved, what will the plan do for you, give you and get you. Clarity about the pain and costs of taking no action to address the problem, and clarity about the benefits of taking right action. Clarity about what the solution will look like at the end.

These three attitudes define a Healthy Organisation Mindset, they identify an organisation where people work together in collaborative ways, where people do what they say they are going to do, and can openly discuss in a constructively critical and professional way when they disagree. The three attitudes distinguish high performing individuals, teams and organisations from those with Unhealthy Organisation Mindsets, which are dysfunctional.

Is your organisation able to tick the 3 attitudes off as ways you already work? Do you demonstrate rapport, accountability & responsibility and have clarity? If so, then it's time to get in a room together and put your stress management plan in place.

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Most people however look at the 3 attitudes of a Healthy Organisation Mindset and slump their shoulders in despair wishing they worked in an organisation with just such a culture.

Ensuring an organisation has these three attitudes is not as difficult as it may seem at first glance, once you look at them closely you can probably see how beneficial they are. Just imagine how effective your team meetings and project planning sessions would be once the attitudes are in place, everyone agrees with them and they become normal working practice. Only with a Healthy Organisation Mindset in place does a stress management plan (and most other plans for that matter) have a snowballs chance in hell of working.

The question is how do you create a Healthy Organisation Mindset? The answer is, the same way as given in the coaching example a few pages earlier, it's not about presenting the benefits of the HOM and getting "buy in" it is achieved by getting a team to work through and come up with the three attitudes for themselves. That way it's a collaborative plan and no "buy in" is required.

Stage 3 of the Ultimate Blueprint is creating and designing your plan the solution to the problem of stress in the workplace. In the next stage I share with you a collaborative exercise, so you and your team can adopt the three attitudes of a Healthy Organisation Mindset as your normal working practice as you go through the process of creating your stress management plan.

Stage 3 - Creating and designing your plan

There are six steps to creating and implementing an effective plan once a problem has been identified they are:

1. Set Up – creating the right conditions for effective planning.
2. Getting clarity and designing your plan – creating a vision and the action steps for your desired outcomes (a plan good enough for now).
3. Executing the plan (without it being perfect).
4. Measuring results and getting feedback.
5. Adjusting the plan according to the feedback received
6. Testing that the plan is progressing in the right direction.

In this Stage 3 of the Ultimate Blueprint we focus upon steps 1 and 2 of the above effective planning sequence. When working with any company to design *any* strategic plan, whether for growing to sell the business, designing a sales training programme, customer service or stress management plan I always start with step 1 the "set up".

Step 1. Set up creating the right conditions for effective planning

I will give you an example of a planning meeting set up. I am not suggesting you use the example as a script you read out, use it as a template to guide your meeting, adjust it and use your own words. During your set up your aim is to create the same conditions as used in the coaching example earlier so all in the meeting room:

1. Are **Willing** to participate.
2. Are **Motivated** to participate.
3. **Trust** they will have a voice in the room.
4. **Respect** each others opinions.
5. Are **Honest** about expressing their opinions.
6. Are **Accountable** for playing their role.
7. Are **Responsible** for committing to their assigned tasks.
8. Have **Clarity** about the problem and need for a solution.

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The **set up** sequence for creating your stress management plan is:

1. Get **Clarity** about why you are meeting – present the problem.
2. Ensure you have a **Healthy Organisation Mindset** in place.
3. Overcome any **Objections** to the plan. (e.g.: stigma, can of worms and deniability)
4. Make the **Business Case** personal and real.

An example of a planning meeting doomed to failure.

James is the sales director for Acme Trading. In the past five years business has changed with buyers being more discriminating and using the internet to get the best priced widget which is Acme's leading product. Monthly sales targets have been increasingly difficult to achieve and James is under continual pressure for his mangers and his team to deliver.

James is of the opinion that Acme needs to review its pricing structure to remain competitive. He believes selling is a cut and thrust business, he thrives on stress and "if you can't stand the heat stay out of the kitchen". What he needs to deliver is a lower price and more sales people.

The company called a meeting to discuss workplace stress, which James thinks is not his problem, that's for HR to sort out. He would much rather the money the finance director was going to waste on developing a stress management programme was spent on discounting, generating more quality leads or increasing his sales team.

The meeting was taking up his valuable time and would no doubt involve tree hugging or candles and meditation exercises none of which James had time for and any stress management plan would only eat into his sales teams already valuable call time, which was unacceptable. In James's thinking the meeting and any plan would be a complete waste of everyone's time and money.

The company went ahead with its initial planning meeting and despite James seeing the business case for it; he didn't see how it related to him or his department. He simply nodded his head in agreement and when the planning was over he went back to his office to continue with business as usual. James has his own agenda and has many benefits for seeing any plan fail.

A scenario far too common in business.

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Set Up Example

"We are here today because Acme Trading wants to implement a stress management programme. We have identified a real time problem that is already costing us over £62,000 per year and putting us potentially at risk to the tune of possibly another £18,000. It is also putting us at risk of losing key talented people. Here are the facts."

This will get attention and motivate participants to be willing to engage in the meeting, but before going into details of the business case, set up the right conditions for the HOM attitudes to be in place.

*"Before we look at these figures in detail and work out a solution, I want us to spend a few minutes ensuring that **everyone** in this room is fully engaged in overcoming this problem which affects and involves every single one of us."*

"Let's start by putting up some rules for this meeting. Rules that we all agree to commit to, so that we can have a productive and fruitful meeting, I will kick things off by suggesting we all put our mobiles on silence so we are fully present and fully focused on the meeting. It is a suggestion only and unless we all agree to the rules they don't go on the whiteboard. Let's have a show of hands, who agrees? Okay and who doesn't agree?"

I always start with mobiles being put on silent as a test to see if the three attitudes for a Healthy Organisation Mindset already exist within an organisation or if they need to be explored further. Some people will not agree with having mobiles on silent, for genuine reasons, perhaps they are on call, or have an important message coming in that requires an immediate response. This is the first opportunity for people in your meeting to demonstrate their *willingness* to openly participate and be *honest*, it is an opportunity to demonstrate and for participants to experience the importance of rapport, accountability and responsibility.

*"Okay James so you don't agree and that's okay, thank you for being **willing** to be **honest** and speaking up, so my question is what are your reasons for not agreeing just so we all understand, would you be **willing** to share?*

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Let James give his reasons and thank him again for being **willing** to be so **honest** and open. If James is unwilling to give his reasons you now have the opportunity to raise the subject of attitudes and discuss the importance of trust, respect, honesty, accountability and responsibility as rules that would make for an effective meeting.

"So what needs to go onto the board so we create the right conditions for everyone to be fully engaged in this meeting and resolving this problem?"

As you go through this exercise, your group will collaborate with each other to come up with the right answers. I have seen groups (with a little guidance) come up with the three attitudes for themselves. They become their rules and not rules imposed from above or from the front of the meeting room.

In this example you might only spend 15 – 30 minutes on the rules, there is real value in having an off site training day exploring the theme of a Healthy Organisation Mindset. Each attitude can be further discussed, explored and experienced with training exercises. Through their own experience they will learn how the attitudes of a Healthy Organisation Mindset are the difference between a high functioning team that creates a plan where everyone is committed to its success and a dysfunctional team with an Unhealthy Organisation Mindset where people feign commitment and pay lip service to a plan.

In *"The Wellbeing Formula @ Work "* you will find additional coaching and training exercises that you can use to explore the Healthy Organisation Mindset theme in greater depth.

The set up exercise will also reveal to you who is out of rapport they may <u>not</u> be willing to trust, be respectful, be honest, accountable and responsible and this is valuable information. You now know where any resistance, sabotage or apathy may come from. Resistance, sabotage and apathy are the three main reasons why so many stress management plans that simply address policy and procedural changes fail to deliver.

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<u>Agreed rules for a productive planning meeting</u>

- ✓ Mobiles on silence if an important call comes in it can be taken out of the room.
- ✓ All arrive on time and meeting ends on time.
- ✓ Remove all laptops / smart devices so no distractions from emails so we know all are focused upon the meeting.
- ✓ Allow everyone to speak without interruption reserving comments, observations and questions for afterwards.
- ✓ All contributions to be constructive, if critical of a point of discussion explain the reasons why so we all understand and offer an alternative point of view for consideration.
- ✓ When we seek agreement on a point we go around the room to ensure everyone is on board and if not, we all agree to explain our reasoning for any objections.
- ✓ All agree to be held accountable for our roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ All agree to honestly, without reservation contribute and commit to participating in the meeting.
- ✓ Keep the meeting topic "on point" if we have to schedule side meetings to go into details off subject we will do so.

Figure 3 – Acme Trading rules for a HOM.

With the attitudes of a Healthy Organisation Mindset up on the white board as collaboratively agreed rules, it's time to raise the subject of the three common objections that normally stop individuals from acknowledging that workplace stress is an issue. As a reminder they are stigma about acknowledging stress, the fear of opening up a can of worms and deniability. There may be some people in the room who hold such views, so these now have to be raised and addressed. .

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Think of this part of your set up as an exercise in *"objection inoculation"*. An objection inoculation *is* where you suspect that there is a potential objection, so you raise the subject early and clear any objections so they don't become obstacles later on. Just like a medical inoculation they prevent problems from occurring in the first place.

Objection inoculation is used in sales – for example, if price is a possible objection that may stop a customer from purchasing, the savvy salesman will raise the price objection before it's raised by the prospect and inoculates against it.

For example a salesperson might say

"For some people price may be an issue, however what previous customers have found is that they recover their initial investment in 12 months and we also have a lease option available for those who prefer to spread their investment over time, so apart from the very rare case where someone literally has no money whatsoever, price is rarely an issue."

An elegant objection inoculation well made early on, makes it very difficult for someone to refer to it later. In this case it would be difficult for the prospect to raise the subject of price as an issue as it has already been dealt with unless they literally have no money whatsoever.

*"Before we move onto looking at possible solutions to our problem, there are a number of common attitudes which stop businesses from dealing with work place stress which we need to be aware of to ensure we don't fall into the same trap, I will give you an example – **stigma**"*

Then go onto explain what stigma means and discuss the subject with your team so that stigma no longer becomes an issue or legitimate objection.

"So what other attitudes are there that can blindside or cause a business to bury it's head in the sand rather than address the problem?"

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Let your team openly and honestly discuss any attitudes that could block a stress management programme from being effective. Revealing possible objections at this stage makes it very difficult for anyone in the room to do them unwittingly or even purposefully later on. There can be no stigma if stigma is addressed and discussed, there can be no can of worms if that attitude is show as ignoring a present problem for a larger future problem, there can be no deniability when the problem is made clear and personal.

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<u>Common negative attitudes to avoid</u>

- ✓ Thinking stress is not my problem and is someone else's.
- ✓ Being fearful of admitting stress (a sign of weakness or failure).
- ✓ Believing stress isn't the problem and its something else that needs to be addressed
- ✓ Claiming you don't have the time to deal with stress.
- ✓ Stress is a personal problem and not a work issue.
- ✓ I'm okay so others should be okay.
- ✓ If we make a big issue about stress it will create even more problems.
- ✓ I don't know what to do about it so why bother.

Figure 4 – Acme Trading – identifying common negative attitudes.

Only when all objections have been addressed is it time to return to the financial business case and check that everyone in the room sees and agrees that it is a problem. Remember to focus on the costs and also the cost of failing to take action.

Your team will now have the freedom and the obligation (because they have all agreed to the rules) to engage fully. If someone is holding back from engaging and participating ask for their honest opinion and if they continue to hold back refer to the rules if needed.

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Taking your time to set up the right conditions for an honest collaboration is time well spent. Trying to set the conditions halfway through a planning programme if you get a sense that not everyone is on board with the meeting, is much more difficult. The phrase used in coaching and training as a reminder of the value of this set up process is "*A pinch of pre-frame (another phrase for set up) is worth a pound of reframe.*"

With a good set up in place, I hope you can see how a collaborative approach created by a team with a Healthy Organisation Mindset is more likely to create a plan where all are on-board, accountable and responsible for playing their part in a successful outcome.

By the end of your set up everyone will have:
1. **Clarity** about why you are meeting.
2. **Agreed** to the conditions and value of a Healthy Organisation Mindset.
3. **Cleared** any objections to addressing the problem.
4. **Acknowledged** the Business Case.

You will have a team that is willing and motivated so now is the time to consider your planning options.

As every organisation (even those in the same business sector) is unique, with its own idiosyncratic traits there is never a one-size stress management plan fits all. You have your own unique people, unique management structure and policies so the solutions to your needs will also be unique. Lets now explore a way for you to create your strategic plan for resolving workplace stress.

Step 2. Getting clarity and designing your plan.

To design your stress management programme we will use two effective coaching models which you can use in a blended form, they are the NLP process for defining "Well-Formed Goals and Outcomes" and the GROW model (Goals, Realities, Outcomes What).

The two models work exceptionally well together, many companies use the GROW model to create plans but find they don't always work out because they fail to take into account a number of conditions which are covered by the NLP process for defining "Well-Formed Goals and Outcomes".

About the NLP process for defining "Well-Formed Goals and Outcomes"
This process was originally used for therapeutic interventions, it's a very simple yet powerful enquiry, which explores where you are now and where you want to be, it is ends results focussed, asks great revealing questions and it works for all organisation and Individual goal setting needs.
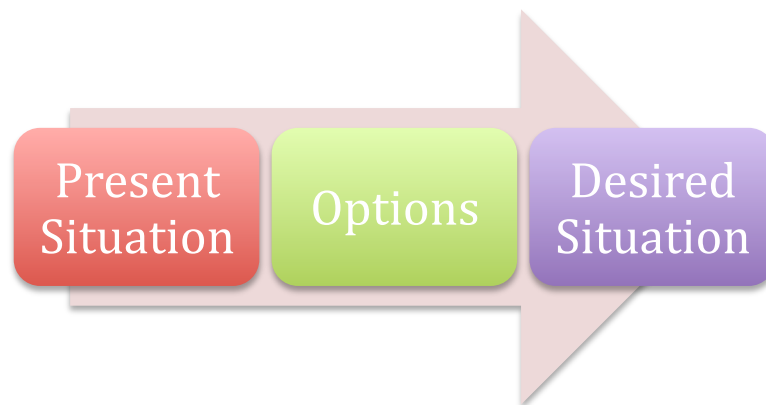
Present Situation → Options → Desired Situation

Figure 5 – Getting clarity for well-formed outcome.

The process works by you asking a series of questions the answers to which have to pass "five tests" that determine whether a goal or outcome is "*well formed"* and therefore likely to happen. This process highlights where there may be "pinch points" or obstructions that could stop a desired outcome from being achieved.

In therapy some types of behavioural obstructions are referred to as *secondary gains*. Secondary gains are the benefits people get from **not** changing. An example of secondary gain is where someone really wants to change a behaviour or situation, but for some reason they seem unable to, secondary gain can often show up as sabotage or self-sabotage.

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In the Acme Trading example James has a number of potential secondary gains (benefits) that could lead to his behviour obstructing a stress management plan whether knowingly or unconsciously. Firstly he beliefs that stress isn't an issue *"if you cant stand the heat stay out of the kitchen'* and may be unwilling to acknowledge it is a problem. Secondly James believes that the companies pricing policy and that competition are problems that need to be addressed. If a stress management programme was successful he may fail to get his discounts or have his problem of reaching sales targets looked into; so again he may resist or even obstruct a stress management plan.

Secondary gains can be subtler than this example and are the cause of many a great plan not working out. The NLP process for defining "Well-Formed Goals and Outcomes" ensures that secondary gains are highlighted and bought to the surface enabling these potential obstructions to be addressed.

The five tests are:

1. *All answers must be stated in the positive* – e.g.: If you ask someone to not think of blue elephants they have to first think of blue elephants in order to not then think about them, this is akin to focussing upon the problem and not the solution. You want the solutions, so you always want answers stated in the positive. *"Don't tell me what you don't want tell me what you do want."*

2. *All actions to be initiated and maintained by the person who desires the goal*. – We can only control ourselves, so the desired actions must come from the individual. If it involves others to take action (especially those over which we have no control) these are potential "pinch points".

3. *Defined and evaluated according to sensory based evidence* – This ensures the goals or outcomes are in language that the brain understands, expressed as what we see, hear, feel and if relevant smell and taste.

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4. *Made to preserve the positive intentions of the present situation* – If we accept that every behaviour or situation has come about through a positive intention, this positive intention must be preserved with any new solution. In the example of James, he has a positive intention behind maintaining the present situation, in order to make the point that pricing is a problem that needs to be addressed so he can reach his sales targets. Any solution therefore must help James to reach his sales targets

5. *Any changes must serve the ecology of the person or organisation* – Any changes we make have an affect on other parts of a system so the ecology, or well being of the system must be preserved. Ecology refers to peers, friends, family, job role, geography (where you live). Changing one part of a system may be affected by the ecology. Tests 4 and 5 address the problem of secondary gain.

About the GROW Model.
The GROW model was originally used in sports coaching; it is equally effective in personal and professional development and as a strategic planning tool.

GROW addresses four distinct headings

1. **Goals** – short, medium and long term.
2. **Reality** – checking to explore the current situation
3. **Options** – alternative strategies or courses of action
4. **What** is to be done, **When**, by **Whom**, and the **Will** to do it?

Use the following planning process exercise to guide your team through the creative process of designing your own unique plan.

Useful tips for your planning process:
1. A robust plan usually requires more then one meeting, the first to achieve a high level plan, there may be the need for research and then a second visit to review the research findings and make decisions in order to finalise your plan.
2. Allow plenty of planning time usually 1 hour is enough for a high level plan for a large organisation (where different department needs have to be addressed) and is enough time for a detailed plan for a small to medium business.

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3. Have plenty of white board, poster space for putting up the information for all to see.

4. Throughout the process regularly stop and test that all in the room are adhering to the HOM attitudes.

1. **Present Situation** - Start your planning exercise by having your team individually answer these questions and then collaboratively and collectively review their answers to elicit your present situation. At this stage avoid coming up with solutions, if solutions are offered write them down but refer to them when you review options. Write up the collective answers under the heading **Present Situation,** if using a white board, place this heading to the left. You will find that many of the answers will be variations on a theme.

- What is the problem / situation specifically?
- How do you know it's a problem?
- Are you aware of all the details and causes of the problem?
- What may stop you from changing the problem / situation?

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<u>Current Situation</u>

✓ 20% of sales team take sick leave off mainly at end of the month

✓ 10% of customer support take sick leave due to stress and dealing with customer complaints (possible mis-selling)

✓ Taking time out of workday to deal with stress is an issue

✓ Likely to lose National Award for staff care.

✓ Risk of losing 2 key sales and 1 customer care staff.

✓ Declining morale throughout company due to absence of a few.

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Current Situation - continued

✓ 1 director absent from meeting due to personal stress all aware of his personal circumstances and his drinking issue, his loss would be damaging to the business.

✓ Company has lost its spirit and joy it had a few years back.

✓ Not fully aware of all the causes or extent of the problem.

Figure 6 – Acme Trading – Current Situation.

2. **Desired Situation** - Then answer these questions to elicit your desired situation / outcomes. As when reviewing the present situation, all answers are to be respected as being valid for consideration. Stick with the wording of the questions as they are designed to get the grey cells working and reveal valuable information. Write up the answers under the heading **Desired Situation,** if using a white board position this heading to the right.

1. *All answers must be stated in the positive*
   - What do you want specifically?
   - When, where, with whom do you want it?
2. *All actions to be initiated and maintained by the person who desires the goal.*
   - What resources do you have to accomplish this?
   - What resources are in your control?
   - What resources are missing or could be better?
   - What resources do you need that are out of your control?
3. *Defined and evaluated according to sensory based evidence*
   - How will you know when you have it?
   - Describe what will you see, hear, feel, smell, taste (if relevant)?
4. *Made to preserve the positive intentions of the present situation*
   - What will happen if you get this result?
   - What won't happen if you get it?

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- What will happen if you don't get it?

- What won't happen if you don't get it?

- How do you know it's worth getting?

- What do you get to have or keep by maintaining the current situation?

- When, where, with whom does not having the change or desired outcome work for you?

5. *Any changes must serve the ecology of the person or organisation*

- How will these changes affect your life? Family? Friends? Colleagues?

- What will be different as a result of these changes?

When you assess your collective answers they will reveal to you 3 important aspects:

- How your plan will look at the end result and how you will know it is working.

- They also highlight the pinch points, obstacles, resistance and secondary gain.

- Where outside support is needed and where things may be out of your control.

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<u>Desired Situation</u>

✓ Measurable reduction in stress related sick leave down by 50% in 1-month aim for 90% in 3 months. (assuming 100% is unrealistic!)

✓ Have in place a regular stress management plan and staff wellbeing system so we can check during monthly meetings that we are doing all we can to reduce stress and give support.

✓ High morale, confident sales and customer support team once again, busy calls being made (no more moaning about work or people being off work) lots of laughter and a high team spirit

✓ Customer care team focused on making customer happy and customer retention rather then troubleshooting.

✓ Win National Award for staff care.

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<u>Desired Situation - continued</u>

✓ *Happier workforce, a place known to support and look after its people for the right reasons.*

✓ *If we fail to address we will lose key staff (and friends) and possibly lose key accounts so imperative we address stress issue*

✓ *What we will gain is retention of key staff; retained profitable accounts and a sustainable support plan for the future.*

✓ *A thoroughly reviewed marketing and sales strategy to meet the outside stressor of pricing and competition ensuring sales and customer support can deliver without undue stress*

Figure 7 – Acme Trading – Desired Situation.

TAKE A BREAK

Once you have this degree of clarity it becomes easier to create and design your organisations strategic plan to get you from where you are now to where you desire to be by evaluating your options.

3. **Evaluate your options.** The gap between the present situation and desired situation is a space of options and choices. The purpose of the options stage of the planning process is not to find the "right' answer but to create and list as many alternative courses of action as possible. Initially quantity of options is more important then quality and feasibility.

This is the stage where changes in Management Standards, policies and procedures can be taken into consideration. Avoid going into the details at this stage until all options are on your white board. Let the creative juices flow and brain storm choices and possibilities. Write up the ideas under the heading **Options,** if using a white board place the answers between present and desired situations.

Ask the questions:

- What if we did…
- What if we had this or that….
- What if we could…
- What could we do to make this work…
- What haven't we yet thought of?

Once you have exhausted the list of possible options, evaluate your choices and collectively explore which seem most appropriate to your particular business.

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Evaluating Options

✓ Conduct the HSE Management Standards review to assess causes of stress to ensure we aren't missing anything – (research best way to deliver – in house or outsource)

✓ Hold a group company training to ensure all the Stress planning is done collaboratively with all staff onboard. (Research options)

✓ Consider training options seminars, in-house, online. (Research and report back)

✓ Consider recruiting a stress management coach – run 1:1 coaching sessions. (Research and report back)

✓ Consider training Jane in HR to be in house stress management coach. (Research and report back).

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<u>Evaluating Options - continued</u>

Marketing and sales meeting to review

✓ *Pricing and consider giving added value, improving quality of leads rather than discounting.*

✓ *Look into creating online series of training videos for customers to ensure they know how to use the Acme widget this will reduce customer care calls and reduce workload.*

✓ *Consider a new call system to ensure better quality lead tracking so less wasted time attempting to sell to prospects that aren't best fit.*

✓ *Sales Training ensuring sales are capable of dealing with pricing issues.*

✓ *Customer care review to cut down service call time and reduce stress on staff and reduce customer dissatisfaction and churn.*

✓ *Review recruitment process to ensure we recruit staff already able to cope with stress (and willing to learn) consider profiling options such as Enneagram, Myers Brigg*

Figure 8 – Acme Trading Evaluating Options

4. **What is to be done.** With your choice of options narrowed down by consensus, it's time to allocate responsibilities and decide **WHO** does **WHAT** and by **WHEN**. This stage of the planning process usually involves researching into some of the available options and reporting back for evaluation before deciding on your final plan.

- Define tasks and check the person assigned or volunteering has clarity about their task, what is to be done, how and by when.
- Schedule in reporting times for accountability and progress reports.

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<u>What is to be done by whom and when</u>

All research to be prepared for review at next meeting in 14 days. With pro's and cons of options available for team review.

James (sales) to research and present options for
- ✓ New CRM system for better quality lead management.
- ✓ Sales training for price handling.

Eleanor (marketing) to research and present options for
- ✓ Online customer support videos.
- ✓ CRM systems for reducing service call time (and compare with James findings for CRM system)

Colin and Lizzy (HR) to research independently and present options for
- ✓ HSE Management Standards audit.
- ✓ Prepare for company meeting to discuss the stress management plan (once finalised).
- ✓ Stress Training options
- ✓ Stress coaching options (outsource or in-house).
- ✓ Recruitment process (personality profiling)

Figure 9 – Acme Trading Reporting Accountabilities & Responsibilities

When distributing tasks or accepting volunteers, ensure all who undertake tasks agree to be accountable and responsible and to be honest if they have any issue with delivering on time.

When your team meet again with all their research and findings, ensure you remind them of the rules before commencing your meeting so that when the options are reviewed and you decide upon the right choices for your business, you have everyone on board

Remember the importance of the Healthy Organisation Mindset, as you want honest collaborative input from all involved throughout.

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Summary

You now have the Ultimate Blueprint for a successful stress management plan so in 3 stages you can:

1. **Identify the problem and make the business case**
2. **Create the right conditions for change to happen.**
3. **Create and design your plan**

Like any blueprint or plan it is a start, the next step important step is implementation, making it real. Stress is a burden with a human and financial cost that need not be there. So if I can be of any assistance to help you to achieve your desired outcomes and to make your plan real please do contact my team and me.

Thank you for taking the time to read the Ultimate Blueprint and I wish you every success with your plans.

Steve Crabb

Wellbeing specialist – NLP Master Trainer – Master Transformational Coach – Clinical Hypnotherapist.

Bonus Section – A Healthy Individual Mindset

By now you will have made a good business case for putting a stress management plan in place, you will understand the conditions that are needed that will make any plan more likely to happen, and you will have clarity about how your plan will look. The devil is as they say in the details and the wellbeing sweet spot is where a healthy organisation mindset, policies and procedures and a healthy individual mindset meet. So to round off this e-book I want to share with you two simple but very effective ways for individuals to mange their stress.

In *"The Wellbeing Formula @ Work"* you will find many additional coaching techniques to deal and cope with stress but these are two of my favourites. Try them out, practice them and notice how effective they are at helping you to have a quiet mind and a relaxed body and you will see why training people to have a healthy individual mindset is perhaps the most important part of any stress management programme.

1. Having a quiet mind

When you have a quiet mind you experience having a calm body, so training your brain to quieten down is a useful habit to learn. Having a quiet mind doesn't mean you won't be thinking or getting things done. In fact with a quiet mind you will often be far more creative and productive.

1. Make these sounds out loud and use a calm relaxed voice. There are 6 short sounds followed by 6 longer sounds spaced out they are*: "Shhh, shhh, shhh, shhh shhh, shhh", and*
   "shhhhhhh…..shhhhhhh…..shhhhhhh…..shhhhhhh…..shhhhhhh…..shhhhh,"
2. Then sit quietly for about 20 seconds.
3. Now repeat step 1, this time only make the sounds inside your head and make sure you use a calm relaxed voice with a quiet volume at a slow speed *"Shhh, shhh, shhh, shhh shhh, shhh", and*
   "shhhhhhh…..shhhhhhh…..shhhhhhh…..shhhhhhh…..shhhhhhh…..shhhhh,"
4. Then sit quietly for about 20 seconds to let your quiet mind settle.

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Ahhhh peaceful. What your brain may want to do is to switch your self-talk back on that's quite normal when you first do this. If that happens then repeat step 3 and let your mind quieten.

With a little practice you will be able to just make the sound "shhh" and your mind will immediately quieten down and if you do need to do the 6 short and 6 long shhhh's it takes no more then about 20 seconds. I use this technique if I ever get caught up with my own stress thinking I simply say "shhh" inside my head to quickly stop stressing, quieten my mind and experience wellbeing instead.

2. The Wellbeing reset

Wouldn't it be great if you had a reset switch so if you were ever feeling stressed you simply press the switch and you automatically experienced wellbeing.

I developed this technique so clients could quickly change the way they feel, it has been used by people who have experienced extreme levels of stress (PTSD, panic attacks, phobias) it is very effective and I personally use it daily to make sure I rarely experience stress. I use it at the start of the day, mid day and just before going to bed.

1. Sit upright comfortably in a chair, both feet flat on the floor and your hands relaxed by your side. Notice whether you have any stress in your body and grade it 0 to 10 with 0 being none whatsoever and 10 being the top amount possible.
2. Now imagine there is a lit candle in front of you and breathe out completely and empty your lungs as if blowing out the candle.
3. Then, smoothly and easily, breathe in fully and deeply through your mouth while pushing the tummy out to the count of seven.
4. When your lungs are full, hold your breath for a second or two.
5. Then roll your eyes up and look towards the ceiling. Imagine that you have a pair of sunglasses on the top of your head and are attempting to look through them, avoiding tipping your head or neck back.
6. Now relax and close your eyelids as you softly and smoothly, breathe out through your mouth to the roughly the count of 11.

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7. As you breathe out, totally relax your jaw and let it hang loose and also relax your body completely letting it go loose and limp and floppy like a soft toy, starting from the top of your head down to the tips of your toes.

8. Become aware of the difference in how you feel in your body and grade any stress from 0 to 10.

You will almost certainly notice a significant shift after only doing this technique once. If you need to repeat this technique a few times to get stress down to 0 then do so as it only takes 30 seconds to do all the steps.

What happens during the different steps of the technique is the following:

▪ By breathing deeply, you are switching off any freeze, flight or fight stress response. Your heart monitors the oxygen supply in your blood and sends a signal to your brain, basically saying to your brain, *'they are breathing again, woo hoo! Whatever was causing stress must have left, so switch off the adrenaline, we don't need it anymore. All is well.'*

▪ Rolling your eyes upwards shifts your brainwaves into a Theta state and automatically takes your brain and body into a relaxed state by releasing dopamine a feel good about yourself neuro-transmitter

▪ Your jawbone is one of the strongest toughest bones in your body but during times of stress or threat the jaw can be vulnerable, so stressed people often hold their jaw tight. By relaxing your jaw, your neck muscles and all the surrounding muscles also relax, releasing any tensions out of your body.

Repeat this exercise again and when you are completely relaxed inside your mind in a gentle relaxed voice say the words "*soften and relax, all is well*"

With a little practice you can just say inside your mind the phrase *"soften and relax, all is well"* and your body will automatically relax and you will feel a sense of wellbeing you can now use the phrase as a wellbeing reset switch.

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About the author

Author, International business coach and trainer - Steve Crabb is a specialist in Stress Management and Business Growth. For over 17 years Steve has worked with entrepreneurs and businesses, coaching and training people to think differently and perform at their optimum best.

Before becoming a business coach / trainer Steve was director of 2 multi million pound companies in construction and IT & training, Steve incorporates his experience into his work, making coaching and training relevant and applicable. Clients include large multi nationals in banking, advertising and media, entrepreneurs and SME's.

Steve is a Master Trainer of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), Master Transformational Coach and Clinical Hypnotherapist. He regularly trains and coaches Internationally. Head Assistant to Dr Richard Bandler (co-creator of NLP) and International author and best selling self help author, Paul McKenna, he has trained and coached over 40,000 people on 3 continents and has co-presented with Paul in London and Los Angeles.

"Steve Crabb is in my opinion one of the top three coaches in the world. If you get the opportunity to train or coach with Steve grab it with both hands"
Paul McKenna – Best selling self help author

Co-author of *"Business Coaching & Mentoring for Dummies"* Wiley press. Steve runs a private coaching and training practice based in London .He is known for having a very effective, provocative, no nonsense (and yet friendly) approach to personal and professional development that is transformational.

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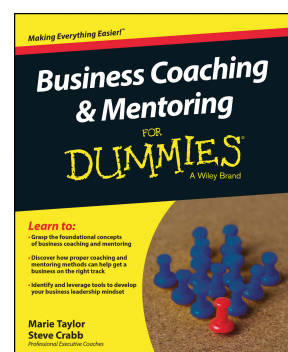
Useful Links & Information

To calculate the stress costs for your business use the online
Stress Calculator

For information about the Health and Safety Executive visit:
HSE stress management

For access to the HSE online tools for assessing workplace stress visit:
HSE Management Standards Tools

For training and coaching options for creating a Healthy Organisation Mindset and creating a Healthy Individual Mindset including In house, workshops and individual stress management coaching
The Wellbeing Company

For information on sales, customer service and business excellence coaching and training programmes visit:
Steve Crabb Coaching

For a self help guide for coaches and business people read:
"Business Coaching & Mentoring for Dummies"

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The Ultimate Blueprint – Creating Your Stress Management Plan