



Mary Kelly, PhD, CSP, CDR, US Navy (ret)
Keynote Speaker | Business Consultant | Author

How Successful Leaders Manage Stress



Stress and the urgency of a crisis can overwhelm people to the point where they cannot function. New leaders are often surprised at the constant demands and daily crises they face. There are immediate fires to extinguish and important decisions that need attention *now*. Top, skilled, and experienced leaders make managing the stress that comes with repeated crises look easy.

How can the rest of us remain calm and react appropriately during times of high stress, crises, or emergencies?

Understand That It Happens

Stress and crises happen every day. Small amounts of stress are good, and [90 percent of people tested](#) well for managing stress. Prolonged bouts of constant stress, however, can be harmful and lead to health problems. So how do high-profile people working in pressure cooker-jobs manage stress?

What causes leaders to get overwhelmed in the first place? For some, it's lack of information or frustration over not being able to move faster in the decision-making process. Stress for leaders can also occur when events are completely out of their control, like when sudden negative press drives a stock price down, or when one employee in one store makes a bad decision, leading to a nation-wide safety shutdown.

What Does Your Body Do With Stress?

When we're stressed, the body releases cortisol, as most people know. [The Mayo Clinic states](#) it's to help us get in "fight or flight" mode. The heart rate elevates and we receive adrenaline so we can think clearly, process information from multiple angles, and work through problems. This kind of stress is good, [according to the National Institute of Health \(NIH\)](#).

Elongated bouts of stress, however, can be negative, leading to elevated heart rates, high blood pressure, strokes, heart attacks, and anxiety as the "fight or flight" mechanism can't be turned off. Chronic stress can disrupt sleep, suppress the immune system, and impair digestion.

How Successful Leaders Manage Stress

To help address stress, Successful leaders use different approaches to combating stress:

1. See the Solutions

Some leaders decrease stress by not making or tolerating excuses. This works for [Indra Nooyi, Pepsi Co.'s CEO](#). Nooyi focuses on her leadership training to see problems as potential solutions.

2. Face the Problem

Other leaders confront the issues directly and immediately, so it doesn't become a prolonged problem. That's works for [Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos](#). His approach is to identify issues and deal with them right away instead of pushing or putting them off.

3. Walk Away the Issue

To maintain productivity, some business leaders believe in walking breaks, where they step out of their environment to get away from a tense atmosphere. Because they know business growth depends on them being alert and focused, they get a breath of air and take a quick walk to stimulate blood flow and decrease cortisol. This allows them to regroup and refocus to find solutions they need.

4. Envision the Solution

If you've ever taken a business coaching seminar or trained as an athlete, then you know that to stop feeling overwhelmed, it helps to visualize the solution or winning the race. Focus on the outcome, and imagine what it feels like to have that solution already working.

5. Get Regular Medical Care

Health insurance changes are allowing for more wellness care, so if you or your team is suffering from chronic stress, consider asking for professional help. [The American Psychology Association \(APA\) states](#) that chronic stress can be overwhelming and debilitating. Some stress may be compounded by other medical issues. I just saw an article about how magnesium can help people deal with tension and stress, and how low magnesium levels can look like depression. If the problems persist, get medical help.

6. Sleep Regularly

I guard my sleep. I am not someone who naps (I didn't even like naps as a child), so I have to sleep at night. While I can function on 4 hours, I really need between 6-7 hours. On a cellular level, we need sleep to recharge. People who are regularly deprived of sleep make poor decisions and work at a slower pace. For me, that means I don't take red-eye flights, I say no to certain events, and I try to get a few solid hours of uninterrupted sleep, especially before a big event.

No matter our roles in the work environment, know that *some* stress is good. It's how we manage it that can help us get to the next level. While we can't stop every crisis from happening, we can control how we react to it.

I would love your thoughts on this topic [here!](#)

***** Please share this article! *****



We are being booked for conferences and events for 2019 and beyond! Let's make sure you get the date you want. Call 719-357-7360 or email Mary@ProductiveLeaders.com!

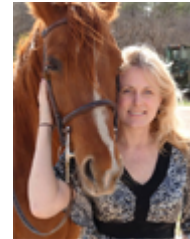
We don't assume, so here is a brief list of what we do:

1. **Motivational leadership keynote and breakout speaking for conferences, conventions, banquets, and events**
2. **Economic updates and leadership programs, particularly for the real estate, insurance, medical, and financial sectors**
3. **Executive coaching to improve strategy, business processes, and profits**
4. **Strategic business planning retreats**

Call me 719-357-7360 or email Mary@ProductiveLeaders.com.

Do you know anyone planning a conference who needs a motivational economist leadership speaker, or a business that needs a push forward? Please [contact me](#). I sincerely appreciate your referrals!

Mary C. Kelly



Would you like to use any of Mary's articles in your newsletter or website? Please include this byline: With over twenty years of leadership experience and a diverse background leading teams in the U.S. and abroad, Dr. Mary Kelly makes leadership a reality for all levels of an organization. Register for free newsletters at ProductiveLeaders.com



ProductiveLeaders.com | Mary@ProductiveLeaders.com | 719-357-7360