

COLLABORATIVE LIFE COACHING

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Mental Agility as a Stress Buster

Before you read this, do a quick check of your stress level. Is your heart rate slow and steady? Are you breathing slowly and deeply? Do the muscles everywhere in your body feel relaxed? Is your mind calm? If you can't answer yes to each of these, you are experiencing an internal physiological reaction to stress. If you do not reduce your stress, you will likely eventually launch into negative coping mechanism like overeating, blaming, indulging in guilty pleasures, stubbornness, withdrawal, worrying, or even use of drugs or alcohol.

I would like to suggest you can bust stress and improve your wellness with mental "agility" techniques. To be "agile" is to be "Quick and easy of movement" according to Webster's Dictionary. Young chimps at the zoo, running and swinging from danger across their rope maze is my first mental picture of "agile". Chimps use quick decisions and physical prowess to escape stress. Humans are fortunate, as we have a superior brain that adds "thinking our way" out to running away.

Would you be willing to try the following to develop better mental agility? You will likely feel calmer and happier if you implement even one of these ideas.

Accept change as good. Life is like a flowing river, and we are riding on that water. We can choose our boat, but we will move along and experience change. This change allows us to see new scenery. We can fight this inevitable movement, or decide to enjoy the way it colors, shapes, and textures our lives. A practical way to improve the way you view change is to make two columns on a piece of paper. In the first list the change(s) you are experiencing. In the second column list the benefits or potential benefits of each change. What are you learning? What new people are you meeting? How is your life richer or deeper? What kind of unexpected texture is the change adding to your life?

View financial, family, or health events you cannot control as opportunities or challenges. You can learn new skills, and develop more tolerance and patience. What woman believed she could help build her own home before poverty and Habitat for Humanity came into her life? How many divorced men find a second love that is deeper and easier? Do you know someone whose used cancer to develop a more meaningful spiritual life? You can choose to be agile and "step aside" if the old way is blocked. You can redefine what you need, and be clear what you want is not what you need.

Everything can be changed; your body, your schedule, your habits, even your connections with those you love shift. There is no "right way" to move down the river of life. When the water is rough,

sometimes a life raft is more effective than an ocean liner. When you transform your view of change from helplessness into discovery mode, your sense of stress lowers.

Develop a tolerance for ambiguity. Rarely are events clearly good or bad; usually they are a mixture of both. Most situations contain a balance of blessing and curse, of up sides and down sides, of yin (yielding) and yang (strong). When we have the courage and agility to value both sides at once, we stop struggling against our own natures and against life. We have full access to all our skills and personality. You already have the mental capacity to identify and manage two sides of an issue. Can you identify how your current stressful situation has a balance of facets you could decide to appreciate?

Focus on what you can control and take bold actions. Stress drops away when you get unstuck and have a plan of action. Make a list of what you can control and what you can't control, then work on the "can do" list. Be innovative. Refuse to be derailed by negative self-talk that limits what you can do. Replace that negativity with positive pep talks for yourself like "I can do this" or "I can take the first step, then another, and another." Ask for help only from positive people who are creative and kind, and who bring out the best in you. Build your confidence by speaking out loud your skills and strengths.

As you see, mental agility is about regrouping, taking a new perspective on a blockade, and moving around the barrier with a new skill. Sometimes you choose a new destination. We can choose to be agile, and "think our way out of the box". When we do, we find more peace and less stress.

To your wellness!

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