**Stress Awareness Week 2020: 2nd – 6th November**

## Stress:

*A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances.*

Sound familiar? Hopefully not too familiar, but at least you are able to recognise your stress! If you’re anything like me though, you may think you ‘don’t really get stressed’ or hear yourself thinking or saying something like ‘it’s hard, but I’m not stressed about it’ – we don’t need to label it as ‘stress’, the important thing is that we can recognise any emotional or mental strain which is making us feel different to how we normally do.

Stress isn't always obvious, and can come in many forms, which subsequently makes it particularly difficult for us to recognise what is causing it and to address the cause(s) to help ourselves manage and reduce our stress.

With a subject of ‘Stress awareness’ this was actually pretty hard to write at this point in time. Of course, right now we have a lot to contend with; challenges we have not faced before, which are definitely adverse and demanding, but we’re all up against the same challenges brought on by Covid-19, right? So, what’s the point in talking about stress when it is inevitable at the moment and out of our control?

I have consciously avoided using particular phrases or words in this post, because I think sometimes we need to keep things simple. For me, I often rely on one word in particular to help me identify and manage my stress – perspective.

Gaining or regaining perspective is taking a (metaphorical) step back from everything going on and thinking of how far we have come, what is realistic for us at this point in time and whether something is a current or potential problem. Simplicity is key in this, taking small steps and a simple view of how you are feeling and whether you are merely surviving, or indeed thriving.

**We are not robots**

Do you ever feel like you are a robot, programmed to get through a long list of tasks each day? That list probably feels longer than usual at the moment, the day may feel shorter and the joy and satisfaction you receive from completing that list, much lower than it used to be. That is OK. In fact, that’s more than OK, it is expected, it is human.

Now more than ever we are seeing our colleagues as people, who have an identity outside of the workplace. We have seen (and heard) colleagues’ children, animals and personal lives in ways that is anything but personal, and it has in some ways increased our humility and identified more common ground between us than we ever realised was there. It reminds us we are all human and there are many other things that are important in our lives.

**Address your Stress**

You may have come across the concept of a Stress Container. Think of any container; a cup, a bucket, a suitcase… how much can you fit in it before it overflows and can’t perform its function in the way it was intended?

Now think of the container as your brain, your Stress Container – how much can you fit in it before it feels overwhelming, tired, demanding and stressful? Thinking about and writing down the things that are in your Stress Container helps to get an overview of everything causing you stress, and sometimes there may be some surprises on that list that you didn’t realise were even hiding in there! Visually looking at these things also helps us to gain perspective, you could even try ranking them 1 – 3 in terms of how stressful they feel or how urgently they need your attention.

What’s in your Stress Container that is completely out of your control?

**Small, practical things we can do to help manage our ‘stress’**

Exercising: cliché, but clichés exist for a reason!

Cuddling: people, animals…stuffed toys!

Talking: to family and friends

Writing it down: get things out of your brain and see what’s in your container

Watch something fun: Zombie films; comedies; You’ve Been Framed! Anything light-hearted and easy to watch

Create a routine for yourself: diverting from routine or changing things last-minute can create higher levels of stress

Remember, whatever we may be to other people, whichever roles and titles we may have, professionally and personally, we are only human and we can only do our best.

By Maxine Edwards

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**Sources**

<https://www.lexico.com/definition/stress>

<https://www.stress.org.uk/what-is-stress/>