

LIFE WITHOUT STRESS

Juan Santos M.S., CRC, LPCA

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A Note from the Author

For those that know me personally, I am a gym rat. I have completed many fitness programs in my lifetime, P90X and Insanity just to name a few. As a counselor, I began to think about why programs such as P90X achieved a warm welcoming from us. Programs like P90X provide individuals with something that is clear, practical, and result worthy. You, me and pretty much anyone else can pick up a P90X workout, insert it in our DVD player and in 90 days have a better body then what we currently have.

I love programs like P90X for three reasons:

1. I do not have to understand the exercise physiology education behind it.
2. I can always benefit from it.
3. I know that in 90 days my body is going to look better than it does right now.

After writing my first two books *Parenting Education for Hispanic Families* and *100 ways married men can remain emotionally connected*, I felt inspired by one too many of my clients. I wrote *Life Without Stress*. This book has three things in it that you either love or hate (1) you do not need a psychology background to understand it (2) you can always benefit from it (3) in 20 days you are going to have a whole lot less stress then you do now. My goal for the book is direct. The

program behind *Life Without stress* is simple to read, result rich, and best of all clear. It is a clear to the point counseling self-help book.

The book supports common people. The 9 to 5 blue collar hard working Americans. The early morning 2 cup of coffee parents struggling to drop their kids off before entering the work day. This book even helps the overly stress medical professionals who work insane amount of hours. The book focuses on understanding stress, worry and anxiety from every angle while creating healthy strategies to assist you in eliminating bad stress. Yes “bad” stress. I told you this book is clear and simply written so that you do not stress over understanding terms. The book is not meant to stress you more!

Thank you so much for investing time and energy into your life and stress. I love the fact that you have purchased my book as your tool to alleviating stress and living a happy life.

See you in 20 days my friend.

Fun fact about me:

“I would have never guessed, not in a million years, that today I would find a home as a counselor. Yet, not a day goes by that I can’t stop smiling over how much I love what I do!”

Acknowledgment

I want to thank my wife Elizabeth, my daughter Nola and my son Alexander for the love, compassion and support they provide me daily. My family's role in this book and in life continues to be the driving force for me and all I am. Lastly, I would not be on this path if it were not for God's grace and endless blessings.

Prologue

Your first two assignments before beginning your journey in the 20-day challenge:

First assignment: I want you to tell your family, significant other and friends that you are reading this book to lower your stress. I want you to tell them for two simple reasons, accountability and awareness. As your journey in this book progresses you are going to begin experiencing some pretty awesome changes. Those around you should know and be there to praise you for your success. In addition, you are going to experience challenges that are aimed to eliminate unwanted stress. You are also going to want these same people present so that they can help you stick with it.

Second assignment: Before your journey begins I want to take you back to the good old days, middle or high school. I remember in high school having an assignment that required writing a letter to our future selves.

You have committed so much of your time to this book by simply picking it up and giving it try. “It is by far one of the greatest personal investments that you can give yourself”. Like many programs that are sold, *Life Without Stress*, aims to give you a positive change in your life in 20 days. I want you to write a letter to yourself for a time span of 20 days from now.

You can hide the letter away for 20 days or be creative and have it mailed back to you 20 days from now.

Push yourself to write down what changes you hope to conquer.

- Do you wish to feel less stress from your job?
- Do you hope to manage your anxiety so that you can date again?
- Are you tired of feeling depressed or sad?
- Do you wish to have just one week where you do not find yourself overwhelmed worry or anxiety?
- Are you ready for a break?

Day 1: Treat Your Self

Congratulations to you. Please take a moment to really thank yourself for taking the initiative to do something for you.

- How often do you spend time and energy serving orders?

I'm sure that within your role and with all the hats that you wear in your life, you often forget about self-care. It's not really your fault. Most people for one reason or another, have this habit of taking on more and more roles in their life. This causes people to feel overwhelmed, stress, anxious and even frustrated to the point of burnout.

Your first day task will be to treat yourself to whatever it is that you may want. Treating yourself literally means that you find some activity or thing for you. Before identifying your activity or thing to do try to consider the following:

- What does your favorite day look like?
- If you could go anywhere to feel spoiled where would you go?
- How do you feel when you are taking care of yourself?
- Where are you at when you feel at ease, relaxed and comfortable?
- What can you do to avoid thinking about your obligations and focus on self-care?

Below are a few examples of ways to treat yourself:

- For parents: Mothers and fathers you may find that treating yourself means a mini- vacation without the kids. Drop your babies off at a relatives or local daycare for a few hours. Go out to a local Starbucks or even a day-spa. When you are there, please do not think about your child. They are okay.
- For 9-5 workers: Use one of those PTO days you have been saving. Or after work do something that you desire to do but are typically “too busy for”. The options are endless. I really want you find something that will bring a smile and sense of relief to your face.
- Take a much needed nap. You are not too old or too busy for a well-deserved nap. Wake up revitalized and focused.
- Spend a few extra dollars for a massage or day spa. Don’t overly think about it. Just do it. The simple thing is that if you treat yourself with a massage or session at a day spa you are going to exit that session feeling less stressed then when you entered.

One common feeling that most people experience when treating themselves is “guilt”. You may experience that you do not deserve this or that it is not fair for you to be doing the activity or thing. Please remember, that you are human. If you are not healthy and happy then your overall attitude and self will impact those around you in a negative manner. People around you, your kids, relatives, co-workers, or

significant other will notice how much happier, healthier and stable you are once you have treated yourself.

At the end of day one you should be experiencing a strange feeling of relief, balance, and happiness taking over. It's as if you have taken a deep breath at the beach, "it feels good". Tomorrow, you should notice a sense of focus and restoration.

Great job completing day one. Just because you completed one and did an awesome job with self-care does not in any way mean day one is over. I want you to treat yourself as often as possible. Every day if it were up to me.

Day 2: Organization

Congratulations to you. If I were with you today, I would give you a high five and pat on the back. As cheesy as that sounds, I would still do it. I believe in you and I want the best for you. If you are happier and stronger, then life itself will approach you as a gentle wave.

Day two is about awareness and understanding. Please grab a sheet of paper and something to write with. On the paper write down your routine for the day. I know, this is an odd task. Start from the minute you wake up to the minute you go to bed. Make sure to include small and large acts that you do. Below is an example:

- 8:00am - Wake up
- 8:30am - Shower and personal hygiene
- 9:00am to 9:30am – Breakfast with partner/self/family
- 9:30am to 10:00am – Drive to work
- 10:00am to 1:00pm – Work
- 1:00pm to 2:00pm – Lunch
- 2:00pm to 6:00pm – Work
- 6:00pm to 6:30pm – Drive home from work

- 6:30pm to 7:15pm – Dinner with partner/self/family
- 7:15pm to 10:00pm – Relaxation; television time
- 10:00pm – Prepare for bed

Remember the time frames are relative - don't stress out over perfection.

Now that you have organized your daily schedule, do a quick run through just to make sure that you have not left anything out that you may want to add in. Remember the end goal of this book is to help you in 20 days overcome stress.

Using the schedule above, I am going to provide you with opportunities of improvement. The opportunities directly impact your stress in helping you manage and eliminate it. Below are activities that you can include:

- In the mornings before getting out of bed make a to-do-list. This can be something real short, simple and to the point. The main goal for the list is that it should be something you can complete that day. A to-do-list provides a sense of responsibility and personal reward as you complete your daily tasks.
- Add a recreational activity, family activity or individual activity after work that you or if applicable those around can enjoy. This can be going to the gym, taking your family to the park, reading a book, or taking an art class. You can even go back to day 1 and utilize some of your

self-care activities. At first, it is common and downright normal for you to feel that this will be a burden to you. That is why it is critical to analyze how your life is now. Ask yourself the following questions:

- “Do I feel that I am living the life I want right now, this very moment?”
- If not, trying something new can only provide two options. The first option is that after you spend time practicing the activities you will notice the benefits. The second option is that you will receive no benefits and you are right back where you started. No harm done.
- While driving to work consider music options, audio books, or podcasts that can help improve your life. I understand that this is a broad statement. First think about what you enjoy listening to and make this task a trial and error until you find something that fits.

By the end of day two you should have achieved the following:

- A sense of accomplishment as you wrote down your schedule and found strategies to add pleasurable and empowering activities in it.
- You may have a sense of relief from the breakdown of your schedule.
- A sense of direction as to what you should be doing next.

- You are gaining control over your life. You are in the driver's seat! One of the focal points about stress is that if it controls you, life becomes overwhelming and difficult. Yet, if you learn to control stress, life becomes what you make of it. Less worry, more enjoyment and fulfilment.

“Please remember, as I cannot say this enough. It is vital for you to actively practice the recommendations in order for this book to help you.”

Day 3: A Simple Approach

Each and every step that you have taken deserves recognition. I understand how difficult it can be to make changes. Especially when the changes are not easy nor the first option that you want to take.

Day three focuses on helping you approach life in a rational and logical manner. As mentioned in day one, we wear many hats and play ample roles in life. Some are parents, employees, friends, siblings, or uncles. Having all of these hats can make us feel at times overwhelmed and consumed by the roles that those around require of us. Unfortunately, I am not going to tell you to end some of your roles. At least not now.

Today I want to encourage you to breakdown the hats you wear into the tasks and responsibilities that you complete on a daily basis. To do this you first will need to write down the tasks that you are required to complete per day. Let's make this easy, practical and to the point by focusing on tomorrows expected tasks and responsibilities.

Below is an example of a typical day that may relate to you:

- Prepare breakfast for the family.
- Drive the kids to school.
- Pick up laundry.

- Run errands.
- Go to yoga class.
- Clean and organize the house.
- Prepare lunch.
- Pick the kids up from school.
- Prepare dinner.
- Clean after dinner.
- Organize and clean prior to bed.

If the day above does not relate to you, please take time to write down your day into short tasks and responsibilities.

Above are 11 tasks and responsibilities that are to be completed. I don't know about you but they seem like a lot for one person to do in one day. The manner in which you approach your day can greatly impact your attitude and overall mentally for that day. In addition, the approach if positive will directly help you in how you feel and act that day. If you are able to approach your obligations in a smooth and comfortable fashion, then you'll be one step closer to experiencing less stress and discomfort.

You have 11 things to complete. First lets breakdown them down into groups. At the end of each group you will have the opportunity to provide yourself with a reward. Your reward can be just about anything you want. Examples include: yoga class, reading a book, watching a 30-minute television show, or simply enjoying a hot cup of coffee for 20 minutes. I know

for me, it's always a hot cup of coffee. Honestly, if you give me a cup coffee I'll give you a smile. It is my definition of sanity and relaxation.

The reward options are endless and entirely up to you. Just be mindful of the time spent on the reward. Too much time can easily distract you from the tasks while not enough time can make you feel uneasy and robbed from the experience of the reward.

Below is an example of the same chores and responsibilities mentioned above with the modified changes. The changes included are rewards that are strategically placed in to alleviate stress and create emotional stability throughout the busy day.

- Prepare breakfast for the family.
- Drive the kids to school.
- *Reward: Enjoy a nice latte at your favorite coffee shop.*
- Pick up laundry.
- Run errands.
- *Reward: Go to yoga class.*
- Clean and organize the house.
- Prepare lunch.
- *Reward: Enjoy a short television show.*
- Pick the kids up from school.
- Prepare dinner.
- *Reward: Sit back in a quiet place and dive into a few chapters of your favorite novel.*

- Clean after dinner.
- Organize and clean prior to bed.
- *Reward: Reflect back on your accomplishments of the day. Reward yourself as you see fit.*

If you need to go back and review the plan listed above. It is up to you on what to place as your reward. The overall points to remember for today include:

1. Be mindful to approach your day in a simple and clear fashion. By making this change you will be able to feel control over the expected responsibilities of the day.
2. Planning ahead often creates an initial spurt of stress while at the end of the process alleviating your overall stress. Invest a little time each day to write down your tasks or responsibilities with the focus being on simplicity.
3. Reward yourself for small and big accomplishments. Each day is a blessing. Allow yourself to find it “okay” to be spoiled and taken care of. As mentioned earlier in the book, you must take care of yourself first in order to take care of those you care about.
4. Be creative in how you reward yourself. Each day does not have to be an ongoing mundane routine. Create fun and enjoyable mini rewards that truly boost your energy and lower your stress. Think of each reward as a “reset button” that allows you to refresh and get back to life at 100 percent.

You have successfully completed day 3 of 20. 17 days to go until you are experiencing less and less stress. By this point you should have already begun to notice changes in your daily stress levels, feelings of personal satisfaction and enjoyment, your ability to remain focused and with feelings of control over your life.

Day 4: Money and Stress

Give yourself a hug. You fully deserve the recognition. The reason is simple and I hope that you can notice it. To change is a very difficult task as most people are stuck in their ways and often find the process of change to be lengthy, difficult and unfamiliar.

Day 4 focuses on the root of all evil, money. I am not a financial advisor nor an accountant, however, I am a professional counselor and one who focuses on reducing and managing stress. Or as I like to say kicking stress right in the behind. Money for most people is a trigger in life. Money may trigger people to feel anxious, frustrated, happy, excited, depressed, sad, angry and many more feelings.

We are going to focus on helping you create control over yourself which in turn will help you manage your emotions when triggered by money. In a very simple way we are going to follow the 3 steps below to help reduce stress triggered by money.

- Step 1: Awareness of the origin of the stress.
- Step 2: Awareness of how the stress impacts you and those around you.
- Step 3: Creating awareness and control over your money.

Step 1:

You are experiencing stress because of money.

I want you to grab a sheet of paper and something to write with. Next find all your bills and payments that you or your family are responsible for. Make sure to document your information by monthly expenses. Somewhere on the page write down your yearly and monthly income after taxes (if applicable add your partners). As mentioned earlier, today the focus is on alleviating financial stress. This means that I am going to show you how to take the control away from money and to you. Having control over your finances gives you control over your stress.

Below is an example to follow:

Mortgage	\$1500.00
Car payment	\$300.00
Electricity	\$100.00
Water	\$30.00
Cell phone	\$120.00

- A. Total expenses per month _____
- B. Your monthly earned amount after taxes (rough estimate is okay): _____
- C. Total in the difference between A and B:

Step 2:

Now that you have the information written and out in front of you, how do you feel?

Try answering the questions below:

- Before writing down my financial information I felt _____ about my money situation.
- After seeing what I have written down I felt _____ about my money situation.
- My money situation is impacting my personal life by _____.
- My money situation is impacting those I care about by _____.
- My money situation is impacting my stress by _____.

Step 3:

Time to prioritize and make executive changes that are focused on improving your overall life. This is not an easy process and it may not be one that you are going to be on board for right away. I encourage you to focus on your responses on step 2.

Making a change in your finances can help reduce stress and provide you with relief. I am not going to ask you to cut your expenses and completely change your lifestyle as that would create stress of its own.

Instead, review your expenses from step 1 and the information in step 2.

Below are strategies to implement when reviewing your expenses from step 1. You can pick and choose the ones that best support you.

- If you are eating out more days than you should be, reduce the amount by one day per week or four days per month. This should save you roughly \$10.00 per month or \$120.00 per year consider that your meal is worth that amount. Once you have reduced the days keep moving forward in a gradual and comfortable rate.
- If you decide to act on the first recommendation of not eating out, great. I want you to put the money that you would have spent on food in an envelope labeled “extra money”. At the end of the month see how much money you have.
- How do you feel from seeing the money you have saved?
- How does the money save support your financial situation?
- How does the money saved help reduce your financial stress?
- Analyze your phone, internet or cable plan. While reviewing your plans really consider what you need versus what you want. In addition, think about the time that you actually spend using your services. I bet that once you review the information, you’ll find a few places to chop

down dollars. Consider the following questions as you analyze your plans:

- Are you using everything that you are paying for?
- Are you using all your data? If not, change your plan to a lower data plan and save the difference. Apply the same technique to your internet and cable.
- Will cancelling a plan and paying the early cancellation fee save you money in the long haul once you switch over to a less expensive plan?
- Are you shopping for extras? These can include clothes, shoes, or things that you may not necessarily need. If so, try to give yourself a monthly cash budget. You could allocate \$50.00 per month or a number that is lower than what you are currently spending. You could also utilize the money saved from eating out for extras. In addition, consider reviewing your expenses when it comes to extras. Consider the following to gain a stronger understanding on spending habits:
 - Do you spend more money during specific times of the year? If so, why?
 - Are you able to sell any of the items you no longer use?
 - Can you wait for 17 days? It's really simple. First of instead of 20 or 30 days, I like 17 days because it's odd and really sticks out. For 17

days you are going to wait and really consider if you want that extra item. During the 17 days you can try to save extra money by not going out to eat as regular.

- Use automatic payments. As we grow older, things really become more hectic. We start taking on more and more responsibilities. Remembering payments is often last on our priority list. I think most people once they receive their bills in the mail place them at a certain trusted location that they often do not remember to go to. I obviously know through practical experience.

Utilize automatic payments in two formats. First, try to set up each bill atomically. Second, add a reminder on your phone and home calendar of when the bills are due. The important aspect of the second part mentioned is that you have control over your bills versus not having control. Not having control can be experienced by forgetting what bills you have, not remembering if you paid a bill or not, or being late on payments. As mentioned throughout the book, when you have control over your stress life will be awesome!

- Create a day each week or month that you set aside to review to your finances. Add this as a reminder on your calendar to help prioritize its importance. When you allocate time to review your finances make it a goal to enter the process with empowerment and control. Common things to review during this process include:

- Are you happy with your financial situation?
- What changes need to take place to make you happier?
- What changes need to take place to lower your financial stress?
- Are you doing a good job managing your finances?
- Have the changes you made in financial management supported your stress?
- Reward yourself with a savings account. The money you save from reductions on food or random splurges can be added to your savings account.

Once you have begun to utilize the strategies and recommendations discussed above, process and reflect on the positive changes in your life. Revisit the following questions below after a month of actively practicing the recommendations discussed earlier.

- My money situation is impacting my personal life by _____.
- My money situation is impacting my stress by _____.
- My money situation is impacting those I care about by _____.
- My money situation is impacting my mood by _____.

The goal of step 3 is to help you create control and empowerment over your finances. You have already achieved awareness in steps 1 and 2. Step 3 kicked things into high gear by giving you the wheel and allowing you to control your finances. If you have followed each step and made an effort towards change you should be reaping the rewards.

Day 5: Inner Healing

Thank you for your willingness to be open to make life better, happier, less stressful, and simply downright a life worth living.

How do you feel at this point?

Are you experiencing positive changes in your life? Small or big, change is change!

- At this point I have noticed that my personal stress has changed by _____.
- At this point I have noticed the following positive changes in my mood and attitude _____.
- My ability to handle stress and difficult situations has changed by _____.

The focus on day five will be a bit deeper than those discussed in the days prior. If you can right now (if not try and do this later) find a quiet place that is distraction free. Please have a sheet of paper and something to write with nearby. While you are in your quiet and distraction free location please take four to five deep respirations. Think about your life. Really try to focus on your breathing, on feeling calm and relaxed. Once you are calm, relaxed and ready begin processing the questions below:

- Have there been any experiences that has caused you trauma - a trauma that continues to impact you today?
- Are you currently experiencing stress from a past conflicting event or relationship?
- Are you experiencing emotional difficulties from an overly stressful circumstance?

Below are a few examples that you may relate to:

- Childhood trauma related to abuse.
- Relationship trauma.
- Bad breakup that left scars.
- Conflict within your family.
- Relationship conflict.
- Personal trauma related to upbringing.

Before we dive in, I want to encourage you to truly weigh your experience and consider what type of support you may better benefit from. If you are experiencing a deep wound or one that you experience troubling emotional distress from when open, please seek professional counseling. This book is aimed to support in overcoming stress. At times traumas and deep wounds can cause short or long-term stress. Today we will focus on managing and relieving stress associated to your personal trauma.

As mentioned earlier, day five will focus on a deeper weighted experience that continues to negatively

impact your life. As you are in your quiet and distraction free place try to focus on the experience.

Below are easy to follow steps in overcoming the stress associated with your experience:

Step 1:

Write down your personal experience, trauma or wound at the top of your paper. As the header.

Step 2:

Write down in bullet points all the ways that your experience has negatively impacted you. Reflect on the physical, cognitive and emotional symptoms that you have experienced. It is completely okay if you cannot remember all of them. Please do not stress yourself because of this. Simply write the ones that come to mind.

Now that you have this list in front of you take a few moments to reflect over it. You may during this time experience emotional discomfort. If you need to, please take a few breaks followed by deep respirations to gather yourself. If for any reason you feel that you cannot continue the activity, it is okay. I encourage you come back and try it again when you feel better or seek professional counseling.

Return to your list and pick one out of the many that you wrote. I encourage you to pick one that you feel comfortable on making changes to. The one you select should be one that can be solely focused on and worked to change in a positive manner. The change you decide to make is going to depend on you.

Below is an example for guidance:

- The issue:

“I am experiencing conflict with a family relative. The conflict is causing me daily stress and basically burdens my day when thinking about it or when I am together with the family”.

The positive changes I can make:

- Allocate a specific day and time to reflect about the given subject versus feeling out of control and allowing the conflict to control you. To do this effectively, you can schedule in your calendar a designated time frame to vent on the subject. It is only during this time you vent.
- Reflect on the pros and cons of spending time and energy thinking about the conflict.
- Is it worth your energy?
- Is it worth your time?
- Could you be doing something better or even healthier with that time?
- How does it help you to do what you are doing?
- Are you willing to address it? If so. Let's identify your options. I encourage you to find a form of communication that you are comfortable with: texting, emailing, a phone conversation, hand written letters, or face to face conversation. Before addressing the conversation practice with someone you can confide in.

- Reflect on how your life can change as a result of you addressing the issue. This process pushes you to think about the entire process from the beginning to end.
- How does it end for you?
- Are you happier after addressing it?
- Will you utilize your time and energy more efficiently by not thinking about this subject?
- Will your stress decline if you address and move on from the subject?

The goal from this point forward is to tackle the list one by one. As you make positive changes on your list you will experience relief, control and feelings of empowerment that will help guide you through the process of change. Once you complete one change reward yourself by reflecting on the positive changes in your life.

- After addressing the bad experience, trauma, or deep wound how has your stress improved?
- After addressing the bad experience, trauma, or deep wound how has your life improved?

Remember the focus of this activity is to help bring light to the negative experience that continues to impact your life in a destructive manner. Whether you do this with the support of the book or through professional counseling you can work towards achieving this goal.

Day 6: Powerful Habits

Much of what you will continue to gain in this book is based upon your ability to directly implement the strategies and recommendations to your life. The act of attending therapeutic sessions is very similar. You engage with a counselor in a private setting and are often asked to complete out of the office assignments. This book provides you with just that. Lots of homework assignments that aid in you overcoming stress.

The focus for today is on the power of habits.

Creating healthy habits can provide you with an overwhelming amount of pleasure, a decrease in stress, and a powerful feeling of accomplishment. On the other hand, when we struggle to achieve healthy habits we often experience struggle and stress in life. I'm sure that many of you have experienced days in which you have:

- Ran late to work because you forgot your wallet or something important at home.
- Found yourself neck deep in laundry and household chores.
- Forgotten or even misplaced assignments or documents.
- Accidentally did not follow up on returning a phone call.

- Missed a payment on one of your bills.
- Ran late picking up your child.

The list can really go on when it comes down to our ability to have control over habits.

As mentioned earlier, life can transition from a rocky road to a gentle wave. Day six requires you to invest in creating a system of healthy habits. Let's start by reflecting on what your responsibilities are and the roles you play in life. If you need to please revisit day 1 and day 2.

Let's start with baby steps. Yes! Baby steps. I love them. Easy, simple and practical. The overall goal is to reduce stress and baby steps support you in approaching this book with ease.

Step 1:

Grab a sheet of paper and in bullet formation write down the most common things that you forget to do on a daily basis. I really want you to jot down everything and anything that comes to mind. I understand that this is an odd task, as you normally would forget these things on a day to day basis. Once you have the information listed, circle one that you want to focus on first. It can be any of your choosing.

For the purpose of guidance let's pretend that it is:

Forgetting the location of your keys in the mornings prior to work.

Think about how this negatively impacts your day and that precise moment when you cannot find your

keys. If you are married or living with your partner, how does this impact your relationship and potential arguments? I know personally for me, it would cause my spouse to say something like, “I’ve told you so many times to leave them on the counter that’s where the keys go”. Yet it took me a while to learn this lesson and build a healthy habit that worked for me.

Consider having a magic wand and all of a sudden you knew where your keys were at. Reflect on the following questions:

- Would mornings be a little less stressful?
- How would the change impact your relationship or life?
- How would the simple change impact that next few hours or even the rest of your day?
- Would you start the day with a little more control and empowerment?

I’m sure that it would be a positive change. Less morning conflict, less finger pointing as you are the person who always forgets things, and less stress.

Step 2:

Now consider what you can do to create a healthy habit around the location of your keys. Below are a few creative ideas.

- Purchase a key finder.
- Make multiple copies of your keys.

- Go and purchase a personal key placer. Maybe a fancy key hook that you like. The experience of shopping for a key hook will support your memory retention in remembering where your keys are at.
- Set an alarm on your phone with a daily reminder about one hour prior to bed to place your keys on the key hook.
- Set an alarm 10 minutes prior to leaving home with the location of the keys.
- Reward yourself each time you are able to find your keys.

At this point you should have a stronger understanding of how one simple change can reduce and even eliminate stress. More often than not, we overlook daily struggles. However, doing this only impacts us in a negative manner. No matter how small the issue or struggle is, it is important to find a way to overcome it. Consider the simple habit of finding your keys. In reality, it is simple.

They are just keys.

- So what's the big deal?
- How does the habit of not finding your keys create so much stress and irritation?

The big deal is that you are in the moment during the experience. More than likely you are in a rush heading out. You may have thought that you left them at a specific location and the realization that you are wrong upsets or irritates you. Or you may deep down

know that your significant other is going to get on you again for forgetting where you placed the keys. This association that you have created leads to stress. So basically, it's a big deal to you. Because you are in it and living it.

One simple habit can cause immense stress. In the moment and long term. Your entire day can easily be ruined and negatively impacted due to forgetting your keys.

Now that you have succeed in understanding how to tackle one of the most common things that people forget we can move forward to a more difficult task. The subject continues to focused on creating healthy habits in order to overcome stress.

I am so happy that you are still here and willing to invest in yourself. One thing that often boggles my mind is how forthcoming people are to invest in their physical wellbeing with books, workout tapes, and personal training. Yet, when it comes down to mental health it often seems to be overlooked.

Once I had a conversation with one of my colleagues, who is a physical therapist. He told me that the most common reason for patients to visit is back pain. To his knowledge, back pain seemed to be that one factor that everyone struggles with. In mental health, I think that stress runs parallel to back pain. Everyone in some form or fashion experiences difficulties with stress.

While focusing on stress, let's pretend that you are experiencing stress as a result of work or school. Try and think about how exactly work or school impacts

you in a negative manner. Below are examples which you may relate to:

- Feeling that you are not valued by co-workers or your employer.
- Experiencing burnout due to being overworked.
- Feeling emotionally tied to your work to the point that you take work home with you.
- Experiencing problems at home as a result of family feeling that you are always on “work mode” or “not present”.
- Prioritizing work over personal health or over family.

Hopefully some of the examples can relate to your stress. If not, please reflect on your own life to find where your stress ponders. Or where your stress “beats you up at”.

Now that you have the information at hand, work to find a healthy habit that will support your stress. We can together work on identifying creative, fun and effective habits that will directly work to elevate the stress you are experiencing from work or school. Below is a description of three steps that you can start implementing today. The steps are geared towards work or school stress. You can transition the questions and strategies to focus on your stress while maintain consistency in the steps. Please remember, it is nearly impossible to make a change in life without putting the effort forward.

“I believe in you my friend”

Step 1:

Reflection: Take time to think back on the following questions:

Why did you first take the job or began school?

What do you enjoy about the job or school?

What are five things that happened within school or job that has caused you to feel stress?

What did you do (personally) to inflict negative stress from school or work?

Step 2:

Action: Take time to review the above questions and the reasons why work or school negatively impacts you. During this portion it is important to identify healthy habits that will support negative stress.

- Reflect to see if you can transition to a new job or different school. During this process weigh the options between the transition of the new and old job or the changing in schools.
- Identify coping skills that can balance work or school with life. For instance, if you are at work and experiencing stress give yourself a bathroom break. Go to the bathroom for about 2 to 5 minutes. While there you can practice deep breathing exercise or positive talk.
- For deep breathing inhale through your nose for a duration of 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds and exhale through your mouth for a duration of

4 seconds. Practice this four times. Work to involve your entire body during the breathing exercise. While inhaling suck your stomach in and pull your chest up. Overall, you should feel a sense of relaxation and distraction after the activity.

For positive talk you can, if needed, write down ten to twenty statements that make you feel better. Or simply memorize them. A third option is to have a significant other write down things that they admire about you. During your bathroom break or time-out session review the statements. Try your best to focus in on what the words are saying and how you feel after each statement. Do not simply just say the statements and walk away. I encourage you to feel the words just as you feel the stress from work.

- Talk with someone at work. Often your HR department will have someone who is able to sit down and hear you out. If you do not feel comfortable with this, you can ask your HR for a referral to a counselor or you yourself can reach out for support.
- Identify someone you trust and can confide in to vent. This person should be able to provide you with what you are looking for. Very much in the same instance as a counselor. You go to a counselor so that you can walk away with help or a solution not so that the counselor is able to receive something.
- Have an in-depth conversation with your significant other or persons who are impacted by

your work. Try and find alternatives to work stress.

- Give yourself a work life. For instance, you are only allowed to focus on work during work hours 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. You are not allowed to do anything work related after. This is of course unless it is an emergency or your work demands 24 hour on call service.
- If your job requires after work (24 hours on call service) carry a work phone and not your regular cell phone. Or carry both but do not pick up your phone around those who are negatively impacted by it. For instance, if you partner feels that you are not present when at home due to always being on your phone looking at emails, texting or calling. Make an effort to only have your phone on you for “emergency purposes”. You must be ethical and competent to understand what “emergency purposes are”.

Step 3:

The last step is reflection. During this step it is important to go back and analyze on how your stress has changed.

- How do you feel after implementing the above recommendations?
- How is your life (work/school) different?
- Has your personal life (relationships, peers or family) experienced impact (positive or negative) as a result of the change?

- What do you find difficult about the habit?
- Are you happy with your results? (If so, keep moving forward).

Let's recap on today and all that you have gained. There is so much value in today, it could have been a two or three-day adventure. I think that's the beauty of working on yourself, it really never ends. There is no time limit, "well at least none that we would like to consider".

Look back at your life and how you have the power to change anything you want. Invest in yourself and give yourself the benefit of the doubt that you can achieve anything and everything that you are searching for. Create healthy powerful habits that surround your life and your life goals. I'm sure that those who love and care about you will be the first to notice the positive changes.

One free bonus for today. Jot down each and every positive change that you have achieved so far. Not just today, but since the minute you opened this book. I can guarantee that you will feel a sudden smile fall upon your face. You deserve it! You are awesome and so worth it.

Day 7: The Must Have To-Do-List

Before I dish out the task for today, let's recap on how far you've come and how much you have achieved. Today makes it seven days, that's one week that you have spent working to lower your stress. You have stuck with it!

Think about exercise programs like P90X or Insanity. These programs are constructed in a similar fashion as this one. Throughout the process you are given so many opportunities to sit back and feel the changes taking place. Of course not physical aches or muscular growth. Instead, you experience a decrease of daily stress, feeling empowered and ready to take on the world or your world at least, and prepared.

Before diving into today's work, I want to you to engage in two tasks. One will be a reward and the other self-reflection. The reward is aimed to help you stay on track and focused on your ultimate goal, to reduce and even eliminate negative stress. The self-reflection activity creates an opportunity to look back at changes you have made. At times, we become so busy that our attention skips over small changes. These changes are extremely significant. As one little change can lead to experiencing a better day.

- Reward yourself by going back to day one and engaging in self-care activities. Pick one or two activities to do. You deserve it! I honestly can't

tell you this enough. “If you are not healthy and happy then you will not be able to support yourself and those around you in your best form”.

- In order to engage in self-reflection, I want you to write down all of the changes that you have made since day one. Small or big. After writing, go back to the top of the list. Reflect on each change one by one. At this point you will be experiencing satisfaction, personal growth and empowerment.

Now let’s transition over to the task for day seven: “The must have to-do-list”.

I think most of us have experienced growth in a similar manner. Since the day we began life, goals in some form or fashion have and continue to be pushed upon us. The act of achieving and fulfilling goals continues to provide rich feelings of happiness. I can personally think back to my first soccer team. I must have been five or six years old. I remember time after time my parents watching me and rooting me on to score goals. It was my goal to score and to win. After achieving my goal, I would jump up and run to all my soccer mates. We would jump and hug each other in celebration. Achieving a goal is such a beautiful thing in life that can provide fulfillment. I like to think of it as nourishment for our minds and our mental health.

On the other hand, during the process of achieving a goal or task their often tends to be stress, worry, doubt, and even fear. These negative feelings that tag

along can change a sunny day to a rainy day. One thing is for certain, we cannot dismiss that goals impact us in two manners.

Even now as an adult, I have daily, monthly, and even yearly goals that I strive to achieve. I have goals for my daughter who is hardly two years old. Often, there are goals that we have in which we are not aware of. Consider a simple task that you do in the morning, such as getting to work. This task is a goal. You want to get to work so that you are not late. Your reward for getting to work on time is not being late. Now consider days in which you ran late to work due to some issue. Maybe you couldn't find your keys or over slept due to staying up too late. As a result of being late, you did not achieve your goal. You may have experienced stress, worry, anxiety, or fear during the process of getting to work.

The simple, yet impactful point is that goals are a part of our life. If you invest time to understand your stress and the importance of a to-do-list, then you will have control over what happens next. You will have control during episodes in which you are not able to achieve your goal. The control will allow you to not experience negative stress.

As the emphasis of this book is to invest in yourself so that you can overcome stress in 20 days it is a no brainer to include goals as a part of the book.

During day seven we are going to work on understanding the importance of a to-do-list as it directly surrounds stress. Before moving forward, could you please do me one small favor. Take a few

minutes to reflect upon your life and pull out a memory of how achieving a goal provided you with fulfillment. I hope that this memory brings light into your day. I hope that you are smiling and reminiscing on that beautiful and powerful occasion.

A to-do-list is not as simple as just having something to keep you from forgetting what you are supposed to do. It does serve that purpose. Yet so much more can be gained from it. Think back to how great it felt to achieve a goal. Maybe you are or were a competitive athlete or avid reader. Once you reached a certain benchmark you probably spent so much time thinking back to that moment. You probably spoke to friends, family and distant relatives about your accomplishment. That simple act carried on for quite a while and altogether it provided you with positive feelings.

A to-do-list if appropriately and effectively implemented can do just that.

Let's start by defining a to-do-list. Just as an FYI, this is not a text book definition. It is something I personally have created.

A "To-do-list": A written arrangement of tasks that you personally choose and that can be achieved within a specific time frame."

There are three important factors to pull away from the definition which will be further evaluated later.

- "Written arrangement".
- "You personally choose".
- "Specific time frame".

Below are key points that I encourage you to act on as they directly impact the success of your to-do-list and the rewards you can achieve.

- The to-do-list must always be written down. With technology you can use your phone or if you prefer pencil and paper, go for it. I encourage you not to rely on your memory as life gets in the way and things that were once important lose value.
- Start simple. Create a to-do-list with 3 to 5 tasks on it for the first day. Once you are able to follow through with the platform and feel confident move forward.
- Always carry the to-do-list with you. I think most people carry their phones like their right hand. If you do not want to use your phone, carry a small pocket size notebook in your pocket, wallet or purse. I always think it's great when people are creative during this process. Don't be afraid to create a personally designed notebook for your to-do-list. The process of creation or even shopping for it will create an internal association which enhances your ability to remember the purpose of the to-do-list.
- Review the to-do-list often. Most people eat at least three times a day and use the restroom, I would think at least once. It is also commonly known that most people read or use their cell phones while eating or when using the restroom. That's an average of four times a day you can review the to-do-list. Remember, this book is

about lowering stress. I want to assist you in creating techniques that are low in stress. Versus asking you to review the to-do-list while you are in an important meeting.

- Before writing down anything on the to-do-list create an arrangement that works for you. For instance, some people have a simple per day to-do-list with daily goals. Others prefer to have daily, weekly, and yearly goals on the list. It's really up to you. I do encourage you to have a system of arrangement when creating your platform. You can do this by having tasks that are to be completed today with a star, tasks for the week with a circle and tasks for the year with a square. Again, it is up to you as part of the definition has the word "personally".

- Do you remember back in school "SMART goals"? If not, do a quick google search to refresh your memory. The only part that I will pull away is the "R" for REALISTIC goals. Make sure that the goals you add to your arraignment are realistic. Do not put goals that are not realistic. I want you to challenge yourself using a realistic and logical approach. When unrealistic goals are added to your list, they can create a wave of stress. Consider if you have the goal on your list to run 5 miles during your lunch break. Let's also say that you dislike the treadmill, the idea of running and you have not ran more than 3 miles since high school. This would be an unrealistic goal that could lead to experiencing stress and a few unwanted muscle aches.

One thing I want you to note, we have not even begun to write the to-do-list. So far we are simply planning and creating a strong and effective platform.

- Write down your daily goals and (other goals such as weekly/monthly/yearly if applicable). Remember, only if applicable. It is up to you to decide if the to-do-list will focus on daily goals, weekly, monthly or yearly.
- Check off the goals as you achieve them. This is a process that most people overlook. I would love for you to be creative here. Have a cool red strike through or a check mark as you complete each goal. This simple small step can provide satisfaction while also lowering stress.
- At the end of each day give yourself a brief 10-15-minute session to reflect on your achievements and to analyze your new goals for the next day. Remember that you are investing in yourself, so you shouldn't feel bad in any way for taking time out of the day to reflect on your achievements. "I often remind my clients that when they are doing well and living healthy, those around them tend to be the first to gain from the positive changes".

The most difficult part of a to-do-list is implementation. Using the information above, you have the tools to implement and effective to-do-list. Please make sure to follow through on what you put on the to-do-list.

Go right ahead and grab the platform that you'll be utilizing for your to-do-list. Jot down tasks to do. For instance, let's say you are reading this three hours prior to bed time. You could right now, write down the following to-do-list:

- Brush teeth.
- Shower.
- Work on tomorrow's to-do-list.
- Reflect on the today's pros and cons.
- Check off tasks that I have completed.

A to-do-list can start whenever you are ready.

Day 8: Awareness

Lucky number eight or is it seven. Really doesn't matter. You are nearly a half way there. Everything that you have learned can provide you with positive change in many areas of your life. Today the goal is to create understanding in order to achieve healthier balance in life.

Understand yourself and who you are leads to better understand how you'll expect to react and how you should react. What a mouth full? I know. Even after writing that sentence, I looked back and gave it a second thought. Let's break this down into baby steps. You are probably like, man this guy loves baby steps.

One of my favorite examples to give before diving in is:

Sam understands that his favorite color is blue. Sam loves blue because it represents the Carolina tar heels where he and most of his family attended college. Sam also enjoys the color blue because of the Carolina panthers. Blue makes Sam feel calm and think back to the good old days when in college.

Based upon the short statement above, it should be clear that Sam understands that he likes blue for the above reasons. In addition, Sam should understand that if someone were to negatively talk about the

Carolina panthers or his university he would expect to react (positively or negatively).

The goal for today is to work on all self-awareness so that you can be mindful and better control your emotions. These changes will directly impact many areas of your life from interaction with your spouse to relationships at work.

Below are questions that will help lead you understanding yourself and stress.

1. What are 5 things that pretty much anyone can do to trigger you? When you think about “trigger” it really just means provoke you to react in a negative manner.
2. What are 5 things that lead to you experiencing stress?
3. How do you manage your emotions and yourself from reacting in a negative manner when others provoke you? Consider the response to the first question.
4. How do you manage your stress?

For example, I am going to answer the questions. Instead of answering 5 things for questions 1 and 2, I will provide one in order to help you better understand the process.

1. I become upset when others trash talk the Boston Red Sox. I am a huge Red Sox fan and an honorable fan at that.

2. I experienced stress when I multitask with the idea that I am more productive. This has been an area that I continue to work on in order to lower my personal stress.

3. I handle my emotions when someone trash talks the Boston Red Sox by disengaging from the conversation or practicing deep breathing exercise.

4. I manage my stress by exercising, practicing self-care, and growing more and more aware of my emotions and stress.

I want you to walk through the activity in similar fashion. If it is easier to do one at a time as I did, then by all means take that route. While engaging in the activity focus to identify triggers that truly change your behavior. Consider in your personal life how your triggers make you feel in respect to the emotions and feelings you experience. In addition, engage in reflection to understand your physical and emotional symptoms during time that you are “triggered”.

For me, it was trash talking the Boston Red Sox. I can honestly say that when people do this, it makes me bite my teeth and have the desire to engage in a heated trash talk debate. Although, I refrain from that as often as I can. Some of my physical symptoms would be clamping my teeth really tight or muscle tension in my arms. My emotions symptoms would include feeling upset or irritated.

At this point, you may be thinking to yourself “I already know what triggers or stress me out”. Great! It is awesome that you have that knowledge. That

means that you are one step ahead of the game. Can you say that you are able to pinpoint how each trigger leads to a specific symptom?

If not, I can help you with that. Today's focus is on awareness. Earlier we discussed and even went into examples of:

- What your triggers are.
- Things that lead to stress.
- How you manage your symptoms as a result of being triggered.
- How you manage your stress.

You at this point should have went into detail to identify up to 5 triggers and stress leading acts. The answers you have provided create a platform for self-awareness in which you are able to identify how a trigger can lead to certain physical and emotional symptoms. With this knowledge you are able to anticipate physical and emotional changes from taking place as well as acknowledge when they will take place. Later in the book we will go more into detail on anticipating physical and emotional changes.

Today you have the knowledge of knowing what will happen as a result of a trigger or stress lead action. Consider if you grow really stress by the idea of your boss calling you. Something about your boss calling you on your cell phone stresses you out because you experience thoughts related to potential firing or problems at work. In addition, you experience symptoms of worry, not wanting to answer the phone,

hand tremors, and excessive sweat. Everything I have just mentioned in the last paragraph is a synopsis of how a stress lead action impacts you.

Now imagine that you have all of this information written down. Your boss calls your cell phone and instead of you transitioning into stress, you review the information written down. You read over how the experience impacts you and how you react physically and emotionally. Due to holding awareness over the stress lead trigger, your reactions will be under control. You will have control over how you react and most importantly over your stress.

In order to master this skill, you should write down your information and the answers to the questions above. Engage in this process until you feel sharp and ready to move forward without reflecting on it. Treat it like riding a bike for the first time. Initially you want someone there with you, holding your bike and supporting you during the process. After mastering the skill, it becomes second nature.

Self-awareness helps people better understanding themselves, how to react, and how to lower stress.

Day 9: DIY

I fun fact about me, I am obsessed with DIY television shows. I guess you can call me a fanatic when it comes to doing it yourself. To me it always provides a beautiful rewarding feeling after seeing my accomplishment.

I want to share this same approach with you today. Day nine requires that you have a DIY project to create personal space. Think about a space that you can transform into a personal zone. Somewhere that you can picture yourself being creative and feeling utterly comfortable. This place can be your car, for those of you that “just love your automobiles”, a room in your house or even an outdoor location such as a park.

Let’s look at the work of counselors, the majority strive to create an office space that is appealing to their clients. If you have ever engaged in counseling, then you are aware of this. In my personal offices, I have and continue to create spaces that incorporate soft music, inviting smells, art work, decorative pillows, and complimentary drinks. All of these things I do because I would want the same thing.

Consider if you had a personal space. List everything you may want in it. I’m sure that some of you would want something comfortable to sit on, maybe coffee or tea, and other inviting things. Everything in your

personal space serves a purpose in how it supports you in lowering your stress.

Imagine if you are having a stressful day. Which option would you prefer:

- Option 1: Would you want to go to a room that has kids running up and down?
- Option 2: Would you want to go to a room with the setting you described earlier?

Your answer and mine are the same. We would want option 2. The space that is warm and inviting. With option 2, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your day or the situation that lead to experiencing stress and lower your stress.

Below I'm going to provide you with a simple DIY description of how you can transform your car, a room in your house or an outdoor location to a personal space. Before engaging in the creation of your personal space, I really want you to feel comfortable in understanding why and how personal spaces lower stress.

- Your car:

For many of you, your car is your sanctuary. It is that one place that you have 15 to 30 minutes of alone time. I know for my wife, it's definitely the place she goes to when me and our daughter become a bit too overwhelming. By adding scents and personal decorative touches to your car it can feel more like a personal sanctuary. You can easily store these decorative pieces in your trunk until you need them.

Explore the benefits to utilizing your car as your personal space by decorating it today during your lunch break or after work. Go out to a dollar store and pick up a few items that will provide an ambiance you are searching for. Set them up in your car and feel the results.

- A room in your house:

A room is definitely more my style. In my house I have the bonus room strictly set up as my home office. It has lots of therapeutic decorative touches like green plants, delightful scents and earth tones. I personally went to several stores to pick out throw blankets, decorative pillows, and art work that would remind me of why I am here and how much I enjoy my work. My personal space is my room.

- The park:

Before you give up on this idea please give it a chance. The park and many other outdoor places can be the perfect location for your personal space. What I first recommend is that you have your personal DIY decorative pieces purchased and ready prior to going to the park.

Purchase a few pillows, a nice colorful or neutral tone blanket and a few battery powered lights. Find a place at the park that sits right under a shaded tree, near a stream or simply somewhere that reminds you of tranquility. The DIY pieces that you bring provide you with the internal feeling that this your place of peace.

Or you can simply enjoy a stroll. I've had so many clients engage in walk and talks with me because being outdoor was their personal space. We would walk through a local park in a comfortable manner. I want to encourage you to consider what works for you.

So much can be gained from having your own personal space. This can be the location that you experience the deepest respirations. This can be the location that allows you to engage in the deepest and most profound thoughts. This can also be the space that allows you to work or reflect upon your day.

Below are just a few benefits that creating a personal space can bring you:

- You will have downtime to reset your clock.
- You can reflect on your to-do-list.
- Your personal space provides you with a perfect environment of reflection.
- You will be able read your novels or engage in work activities.
- Your stress level will have a chance to be monitored and controlled.
- This can be your personal sanctuary to regain your composure.
- You can engage in self-care activities such as walking or taking time off from the rest of the world.

Day 10: Reflection

You are now at the half way mark. Congrats! I'm sure that you have noticed the countless praise I provide you as you journey through the 20 days. I honestly believe in this program and in your ability to benefit from it.

Today let's focus on your ability to reflect on the changes you have made so far. Similar to many programs, this one requires that you are actively implementing the recommendations to your life. It can be so easy to become distracted by a television show, an assignment at work or an engagement with friends.

With that being said, let's use today to reorganize the rest of the upcoming 10 days. Pull out your calendar and jot down an hour for each of the upcoming 10 days that you can dedicate to this book. One hour out of your entire 24-hour day is not too much to ask for. Consider how important that hour is to you as it directly impacts the personal investment that you are making in yourself. At the end of the day if you are not happy, sane and healthy then daily ordinary tasks can become giant hurdles that leave you feeling stressed out, anxious or overly frustrated. But that's not going to happen. Not with the commitment to you.

Below are questions to answer and reflect upon prior to moving to day 11. Before engaging on the questions, I would ask if you could write down your responses. The act of seeing your work as you reflect on it increases your success.

- Has my stressed on a daily basis decreased? If so how.
- What are positive changes that I am proud of so far?
- Have close friends, family or my significant other noticed positive changes in me since beginning the book?
- Do I feel that I have more control over my personal stress?
- Do I feel that I have more control over my work related stress?
- Have I been able to attain better sleep?
- Has my relationship with myself improved?
- Has my relationship with friends, family or my partner improved?
- Do I feel that I have more control over my day to day activities or tasks?
- Do I feel that I know myself better?

Remember, day 10 is about reflection. This is not supposed to be a long lengthy task. Honestly, I did not create this book to give you lengthy tasks, that would in itself be stressful. I want you to face each task and day with excitement and empowerment.

You are awesome and you rock!

Day 11: Negative People

One of the most difficult tasks that can provide you with plenty of positive reward is weeding out negative factors within your life. For the next three days we are going to focus on three areas within your life that will provide you with positive results in the form of stress.

- Negative people.
- Harmful habits.
- Destructive behaviors.

Before we jump right into any of these three areas let's first look at the larger scale. Why and how will these changes positively impact you. More often than not your daily stress, anxiety and life hurdles are directly impacted by one if not more of the three: people, habits and behaviors.

Today's assignment requires that you write down on a sheet of paper or your smart phone all of the people that come to mind who negatively impact you. Think about this as broad as you can. These are individuals who increase your stress level. Some may be friends, family members, or co-workers. Don't be afraid to write down people such as your boss or in-laws. It doesn't matter if some of the people on your list are impossible to physically remove from your life.

Once you have the names down please scale each person from (0 to 10) 10 meaning that the individual impacts your life in a significant negative manner.

Now let's transition to harmful habits. Reflect on your life and consider the habits that negatively impact your stress, anxiety, personal wellbeing, and overall level of health. These harmful habits can include: smoking, drug and alcohol use, not exercising, unhealthy diet, irregular sleep, eating late, over working or not engaging in self-care.

Once you have the habits down please scale each habit from (0 to 10) 10 meaning that the habit impacts your life in a significant negative manner.

Lastly, let's focus on destructive behaviors. Please do not to mislabel behaviors with habits. Behaviors should include negative slander towards others, bullying, treating peers in a disrespectful manner, problems managing your anger or frustration, unethical behaviors at work or in the community such crossing personal boundaries, dishonesty, or low work ethic.

A strategy that can help you identify your destructive behaviors is to ask someone close to you such as your spouse or a close friend. Once you have the behaviors down please scale from (0 to 10) 10 meaning that the behavior impacts your life in a significant negative manner.

Remember there are no wrong answers. Today and for the next three days we are going to focus on you. Investing in yourself can always provide a significant return. Look at nutritional programs or exercise

programs. The total emphasis of these programs is self-investment. You, me and everyone else wants a return on what we invest in. This book offers you a stress transformation in 20 days. This means that you will experience a decrease in your daily stress and anxiety while achieving “control over your life and the daily hurdles”.

Weeding out negative people from your life.

Removing people from your life is one of the most difficult task to complete. Before moving forward into the activity, let’s really think about what it will take to remove the individual(s) you have written down. You will have to measure each move you take from every angle in order to come out with the most effective solution.

Below is an example to follow.

Let’s say that you selected your mother in-law. First I encourage you to create a pros and cons list as to how this person impacts your life.

Pros list:

- The mother to your spouse who you love dearly.
- A person who has substantial influence within the family (spouses’ family).
- Gives you gifts and baked goods.
- Can be a nice person if you catch her at the right time and under perfect conditions.

Cons list:

- Can be a pain in your rear end.
- Creates stress between you and your spouse which impacts home life.
- Creates stress that often lingers and last for a few days.
- Negative past history that you just can't seem to let go "due to your mother in-law initially not approving you as the spouse to her child".
- Is annoying!

Now that we have this list it is important to find a person who you can trust and confide in. In this scenario, I would encourage you to discuss this with your spouse as that person is directly involved. If the conversation does not go to plan, take it to your preacher or local counselor as an outsider's input can often add insight to what may be overlooked.

Now that you have your pros and cons list as well as a conversation regarding the topic we can transition to a solution. One important factor to note prior to moving forward. If your mother-in law is causing destructive behaviors such as physically or verbally hurting you, I would suggest a break in the relationship. A break will allow a healthy pause until the relationship can be assessed and supported by a professional. In addition, if your mother in-law is acting in a manner that you and your spouse feel is harmful then it is up to you to decide on what to do.

Two decisions that you can make at this point.

A. You can continue the relationship.

Continuing the relationship will require changes to take place. It is important that you and your spouse have a clear idea as to what boundaries you would like to address with your mother-in-law and how these boundaries can create positive change. Boundaries can include:

- That when the two of you are together there will be no negative slander.
- If you feel like saying something negative, you can excuse yourself and leave the room to practice a coping skill of release. Below are a few examples of coping skills that can support you during this phase:
 - Deep breathing.
 - Muscle relaxation.
 - Writing down how you feel or what you want to say.

It is important that all persons impacted by this can agree to the change as it will directly impact their wellbeing. Practice implementing this change while monitoring your progress in your stress, anxiety, or frustration levels. Common questions to ask yourself while progressing in the relationship:

- Has my stress increased or decreased?
- Has my anxiety towards the person increased or decreased?
- Do I feel frustrated when I'm around the person?

B. You can create healthy distance in the relationship.

First off, “yes there is such a thing as healthy distance”. Even with in-laws. Creating healthy distance requires that you take a very similar approach to that discussed in the first decision “continuing your relationship”. It is important that you and your spouse discuss this topic and agree upon it prior to acting on it. In addition, your mother in-law should be aware of the change taking place.

This is a great opportunity to discuss why you have decided to move with this plan. Your mother in-law may change her behaviors after hearing the change that you are implementing. If not, stick to your guns and as needed re-explain why you decided to act upon it. There is no shame in being vulnerable and expressing how negatively a relationship has been impacting you.

How are you feeling so far with what has been discussed?

Remember change takes time, commitment, and energy.

We have just completed one person on your list. This person required a more in-depth approach as it was a family member. With friends you are going to have to act on a similar approach in order to weigh the options and act on the healthiest and most effective decision. Don't be afraid to make yourself vulnerable as it will allow you to experience the negative feelings that are brought upon by the individuals on your list.

Some may experience thoughts and feelings of doubt. Insecurities and uncertainties in decisions. I ask you to first go back to the beginning of the exercise and truly identify the relationship that you have with this individual. At the end of the day, you have to invest in your personal health and stress. Don't turn your back on others, simply surround yourself with people that support you in all areas of life.

Great job today.

Day 12: Harmful Habits

The goal for today is to transition over to harmful habits. If you need to please revisit day 11 to refresh on examples of harmful habits. You should have a written list of your harmful habits with each habit scaled.

Below is a template on how to overcome your harmful habits.

On the header of the paper write down one of your harmful habits in large bold words. Let it stick out to you as something that is staring you right in the face. Below, draw a vertical line right down the middle of the paper. On the left side write down pros as your header and on the right write down cons as a header.

Let's run with the idea that the harmful habit is "not exercising regularly".

Pros would include:

- You may have more time to do other things you enjoy.
- You don't have to worry about paying for a gym membership.
- You don't have feel muscle soreness, aches and pain as a result of exercising.

- You don't have to go out of your comfort zone (in case you are experiencing difficulties with social environments).

Cons would include:

- Placing yourself at higher risk for cardiovascular disease.
- Experiencing negative side effects in other areas of your life such as but not limited to: weight gain or feeling embarrassed by your weight or appearance.
- Low self-esteem as a result of your personal image.
- Irregular sleep.
- Always feeling tired.
- Poor dieting.

At this point you should have a pros and cons list to your habits. One thing to remember is that this process is vital. If you simply skip to the conclusion and begin to exercise, you will be at risk to relapse back into old habits. The process that you have just gone through allows you to gain awareness and understanding as to why you are desiring to make this healthy.

Now that you have a pros and cons list. You can take this process further. Reflect on the questions below:

1. How can exercising regularly improve my overall life?

2. What is my action plan to create a healthier habit?

3. What are potential pitfalls that I may encounter? This is a great place to reflect back on how you may have in the past attempted to change your habit.

Push yourself to identify how a change in exercising regularly impacts your life. For instance, some people may disclose:

- “That they will feel more comfortable in public or at the beach”.
- “That they will have an easier time initiating relationships and making friends”
- “They won’t feel that others are judging them”.

Your plan should be as detailed and organized as possible. Please go back to day 2, 3 and 7 where we discussed organization, prioritization and planning. Revisiting these days can strengthen your overall success in creating healthier habits and lowering your stress. Make a solid effort to create a platform that will be in every angle supported. If you need to, find a friend that you can depend on and confide in.

At the beginning of the book, I asked you to tell your friends and family about this book so that you could receive encouragement and support. Today, you have another opportunity to do just that. Changing habits, is downright difficult. Most people get used to their old ways. Often not because it is bad, but simply due to comfort. Having friends and family around you

during your process of changing a habit can really give you an edge in succeeding.

There are bound to be a number of hurdles that will sneak up on you. The thing is that you have to be honest with yourself. The harmful habit of “not exercising regularly” is not a new habit. You have actively engaged in this habit for a while. The ugly truth is that in some ways your mind and body took pleasure to this habit and will fight you when you work to remove it. I encourage you to remember this and fight harder! When an obstacle arises, such as “not having time” or “feeling too tired”, make an effort remember that is your old habit fighting with your new one.

That marks the conclusion to day 12.

Day 13: Destructive Behaviors

You know, I could have written “bad behaviors”, “behaviors that are impacting your life in a negative manner” or even “behaviors that you feel are holding you down from becoming that awesome happy person you strive to be”. I did not write any of these however. I wanted to give you the most pungent and loud verse possible.

When you think of destructive behaviors what comes to mind?

You may think of someone who is extremely selfish to the point that they step on others to get through in life. Or someone with drug problems. While exploring your answer you may dismiss smaller, yet significant ones such as verbally lashing out at others, problems controlling your anger, self-defeating mindsets or negative mindsets. Below is a template outlining how to progress through your destructive behaviors one step at a time.

For the purpose of an example, let’s consider that the destructive behavior is holding the following mindset “no one likes me, what’s the point of trying”.

Answer the following questions below:

- When did you first begin to hold this mindset?

- Why do you believe your mindset? Please be detailed in describing what validates your mindset.
- How does your mindset impact your life? Consider all roles within your life.
- What are examples of situations that trigger or cause you to experience the mindset “no one likes me, what’s the point of trying”?
- How do you feel when experiencing the mindset?
- What do you want to do when experiencing the mindset? Please be detailed in your response.

Now that you have a beginning place to your mindset, let’s evaluate how the mindset impacts you.

On a sheet of paper draw a vertical line right down the middle. On the right side write down all of the Pros to your mindset and on the left side write down the Cons to your mindset. Be as detailed and forthcoming as you can. No one is judging you during this process of healing, only you. The more you can put into this process the more that you’ll be able to get out.

After completing the pros and cons list, reflect on the question below:

If you could change your current mindset “no one likes me, what’s the point of trying”. What would you change it to?

Now transition to the questions below.

- How does the new mindset compare to the current one?
- How does the new mindset support your stress and mental health?
- How does the new mindset help you in life?

Earlier, I asked you to write down “why you believe your mindset”. Take 10 to 15 minutes to review your answers. You may find some of your answers to be based upon past events that may even be considered traumatic events. If so, I strongly urge you to seek a professional counselor as traumatic events often require more direct support. If your content is not traumatic, consider its impact. Scale each of your answers from (0 to 10) 10 being the most significant.

Now that you have scaled your response(s) to “why you believe your mindset” we can work on an action plan. This will require you to invest energy, time and dedication. You have held your mindset for so long. It may even have in some ways become second nature, like riding a bicycle or driving a car. To change it will require devotion and some fighting in your part.

Below are helpful suggestions on committing to your new healthy mindset.

- Write down reminders on your phone of your positive mindset.
- Have sticky notes of your positive mindset everywhere. I mean in your car, in your home, at work. Go nuts with it. You want your brain to be refreshed on the positive mindset as much as possible.

- Find a person who you can confide in to help you. Inform this individual on how you are working to eliminate destructive behaviors, specifically “your mindset”. Ask this person to write down 5 things that they feel will help you overcome the mindset. Carry the information with you as a constant reminder during difficult times. Some people may write down positive statements such as “I’ve known you for over 10 years, you are the strongest person I know”. After reading the information you will feel empowered and reassured to move forward.
- Be aware of your triggers or what exactly causes the “negative mindset” to rise. It is important to know yourself in and out in order to remain in control of your life and your mindset.
- Expect failure. You will have days upon days in which your destructive habit will have control over you. That is okay. It may win the battle but not the war! Keep pushing forward as failures only gives you a stronger edge in understanding more and more about yourself.
- Start documenting positive changes as soon as they take place. Remember you are thoroughly educated on your negative mindset. Become even more knowledgeable of your positive mindset. Write down how it makes you feel, the thoughts that you experience, the changes others have noticed in you, the importance of the change.

Lastly answer the questions below:

- Why do you believe your new positive mindset? Please be detailed in describing what validates your mindset.
- How does your positive mindset impact your life? Consider all roles within your life.
- How do you feel when experiencing the positive mindset?
- What do you want to do when experiencing the positive mindset? Please be detailed in your response.

Before we wrap up day 13, I am going to present a bonus to you. During days 11, 12 and 13 you were really pushed. These days required you to go above and beyond in the amount of time and energy invested. For that reason, I want you to go back and read over days 11, 12 and 13. Make sure that you are truly walking away with the positive changes in eliminating negative people, harmful habits and destructive behaviors. These three core areas are often what causes most stress.

Wait. I said that I would give you a bonus. The bonus is for you to go back to what is my favorite day, ONE. Go back and engage in self-care. Treat your self during challenges as a constant reminder that you deserve the best and that you also need balance.

I truly believe that you have the resources in front of you to overcome these challenges.

Awesome job on completing day 13.

Day 14: The Small Accomplishments

One of my favorite pleasures in life is the feeling of an accomplishment. I personally love the feeling of ending a workout, completing a session with a client, or adding the finishing touches to my daughter's hair prior to shipping her to the grandparents. I guess for me it's being able to see my work valued and completed. There are so many gems in this book that you have right at your fingertips.

Today the focus is on treating each day as an achievement. I know that this sounds "difficult". Yet, I know for a fact that you, like me and everyone else have something to be proud of each and every day. We just have to find it.

Before we begin today's work, I want you to reflect on two of your biggest and most profound accomplishments.

- What were the accomplishments?
- How did they make you feel?
- Where were you when it happened?
- Why is this an achievement for you?
- How did the achievement impact you that day or even that week, month or year? Consider your mood and overall presence when answering the question.

Be sure to provide as much detail as you can to the above questions. If you like, you can simply write it down or think over each question.

Imagine if each day you could relive a great accomplishment. You could experience that victory, happiness, and overwhelming feeling of positivity. It would be awesome! What tends to happen is that life inclines us to focus more on the negative and skip right over the positive. Life can be a bit much.

Consider a typical day you may have. You more than likely wake up in the morning, go to your job, maybe workout afterwards, and then you return home. On days that things do not go well, such as a day in which you accidentally get a flat tire or leave important documents at home you experience bad stress. You basically have a bad day. More than likely you invest a lot of energy into the bad part of your day and skip over the good stuff that happened that day.

Now consider that the example we just discussed took place. Instead of entirely focusing on the flat tire as being something bad, you focus on the accomplishment of how you acted to resolve the problem. At this point, you are focused on the accomplishment and are experiencing feelings such as:

- Personal pride.
- Happiness.
- Excited that you fixed a flat tire.
- Independent.

Yet, as I mentioned life is busy. Time tends to fly so fast that we forget to stop, breathe and reflect on the small victories. On days 2, 3 and 7 you were presented with organization, a simple approach, and the must have to-do-list. You have the perfect platform to move forward and experience the benefits of today.

To effectively utilize days 2, 3 and 7 in a fashion that supports today's goal of experiencing daily accomplishment, I want you to have something to write with handy.

On small sheets of paper write down at least 50 tangible things that you would like. Pretend that you are 10 years old again and writing a list to Santa. Make sure that the items you are wanting, you yourself can afford and as mentioned earlier are tangible.

For instance, you can write:

- A new shirt from H&M.
- New shoes.
- A video game from Game Stop.
- \$5.00.
- A yoga class or a deep tissue massage.

Be sure that you have all the things on individual paper slips. Find a bowl, small basket or even an empty shoe box. Place all of your slips inside here. For now, put the bowl aside as we will get to it later.

At the end of each day I want you to invest 15 to 30 minutes on yourself by reflecting over your daily to-do list and schedule. How many tasks did you complete on your to-do-list? One, two maybe even three.

- If for some reason you have not completed any, I want to encourage you to take a few steps back and create tangible tasks. The ultimate goal is to challenge yourself while feeling accomplished.

Now that you are reviewing and scanning over your day, answer the following questions:

- Are you proud of yourself with completing the task(s) that you have checked off?
- How do you feel when reflecting on the task(s) that you completed?
- Are you enjoying the feeling?
- How have the changes you made today impacted your daily stress and happiness?

After taking time to reflect over your accomplishments, pull out one slip of paper from your bowl, small basket or empty shoe box. You deserve it. You are not being selfish. You are not being childish. You are simply investing in yourself and reaping the rewards. At the end of the day why should you not feel happy?

- You deserve to feel less stress.
- Control over your life.
- Empowerment and strength over your daily hurdles.
- You deserve a “pedicure” or even a “pair of new shoes”.

This book is all about providing you with the tools that can guide you experiencing less stress, more control, empowerment, and happiness.

Day 15: Best Friends Worry and Stress

Stress and worry are both related and the building blocks of anxiety.

Day 15 is about understanding your stress, worry and anxiety in order to take on the curve balls that life throws at you. I want you to consider three things that happened this year which have increased your stress or inclined you to feel worried.

Write it down.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

For me, the first thing that comes to mind is my family.

This past year, my father had a heart attack. I vividly remember receiving the phone call from my family late at night. Seeing my dad, lying on a hospital bed with tubes all over him. It was scary and debilitating. I honestly struggled with the idea. My dad has always been this bigger than life person to me. He literally is the American dream. Coming to this country from the Dominican Republic with nothing to his name. He worked like a dog, making way as best as he could. And to see him lying on the hospital bed with no

strength to even hold a 2-minute conversation. It was a very difficult experience for me and my family.

My father's heart attack directly impacted my personal life and that of those nearest to me. I found myself easily distracted and unfocused. I found myself struggling to pay attention and to contain my emotions. I was easily triggered and provoked by the smallest things.

And yet, I was supposed to be this "counselor", "healer", "professional who held his stuff together".

Maybe in your life the stressful or worrisome moments had to do with something personal such as:

- Dealing with a relationship obstacle that almost pushed the two of you away.
- Overcoming work stress that was causing you to feel burned out and cognitively exhausted.
- Managing your financial problems.
- Controlling negative and destructive thoughts or emotions.

Your experiences, like mine, more than likely had some sort of toll on you. I know for me it was a struggle to overcome. One important lesson that I learned and continue to advocate today is preparation. It is so important to truly understand your emotional triggers, healthy coping skills, and how you react physically and cognitively. These tools build the platform that can take on stress and worry.

Imagine if the stressful and worrisome experience you had did not impact you in a negative manner because you at that time in your life had the tools to overcome it. I'm sure that you would not have been impacted in the same manner. I'm also certain that your life and lifestyle would not have been impacted in the same manner.

In no way am I telling you that life will not through you a curve. Life certainly will. The difference is that you, after today, will have the ability not to fall on your behind. You may strike out, get a hit or even a homerun. But you will certainly not fall on your behind.

Let's take a moment to reflect on the experience that you wrote down earlier by going through a few questions:

- After the experience what emotions/feelings did you experience?
- What are negative changes that took place in your personal life as a result of the experience? Try to consider the changes that you, yourself made.
- Based on the changes you made, were there any individuals impacted by them in a negative manner? Consider work associates, peers, family members, or even the random person at the grocery store.

Now we are going to dive into a few more questions:

- Think about the experience and in as many words as you want to use, justify your emotional and physical reaction to the experience?

The answer to the question above should be detailed and your foundation to understanding your reaction. By understanding your physical and emotional reaction, you are in turn developing your comprehension of awareness. This is the framework that will prepare you for any curve ball life may throw.

If you have problems remembering your entire reaction, seek support. Ask those that may have been impacted by it. For instance, in my case with my father. I could ask my siblings, my mother, or my wife. These individuals would have firsthand experience with how I reacted, what I did or did not do, and basically how they perceive me through the experience. During this time, do not feel offended if these individuals provide you with direct statements. Remember, the goal is awareness.

Common questions to ask peers as you seek answers to your physical and emotional reaction.

- During the experience do you remember how I reacted to it?
- During the experience did I seem distant or quiet?
- During the experience was I easily upset or agitated?
- How would you say I handled the experience?

At this point you should have an understanding of your physical and cognitive reaction as well as how you impacted others. You should have feelings, emotions, and behavioral changes written down.

Below is an example of what my experience looks like:

Experience: *My father's heart attack.*

- Emotions/Feelings: Sad, depressed at times, crying, angry, and frustrated.
- Behavioral changes: pulled away from others, limited my communication, distant from spouse, over working, and not my usual self.
- Cognitive changes: easily agitated, distracted, and over focused on work.

Take a moment to reflect on mine. It is vital to understand not only how you see yourself but how others are noticing you. I remember when I did this activity with my wife, Elizabeth, and she told me “*you pulled away from me*”; “*all you wanted to do was work*”. It was very painful hearing these words. But I needed to. I, like you, needed to understand how something *stressful, anxiety driven, or worrisome* can impact me and those around me.

Now that you have created a foundation, the next step is handling it. Being able to take on the curve ball with some sort of healthy reaction.

Coping skills are designed to support, aid, assist, or help someone deal with a negative or unwanted emotion. I want you to reference the day 20 to pick

and choose the coping skills you like and give them a try. Truly it is difficult for me to pinpoint the coping skills that would best fit your case. You will have to invest time and energy into practicing the coping skills and noting if there has been a desired change. The desired change is entirely unique to you.

Changes you will want to consider noticing with your coping skill(s):

- Do you feel emotionally stable?
- Are you feeling better?
- Can you notice that your stress, anxiety or worry has decreased?
- Do you feel in control of your emotions?
- Do you feel comfortable and knowledgeable in utilizing your coping skill(s)?

To recap: day 15 was about you understanding your stress, worry and anxiety in order to take on the curve balls that life throws at you. Together we walked through a stress driven experience and explored the physical and emotional reaction. We also identified how using coping skills can support with creating balance in life and lowering stress.

Day 16: Living In The Moment

Living in the moment while planning in a healthy manner. Now that sounds like a great combination to have when approaching life.

If you ask me there are two basic messages:

- Do we live in the moment?
- Do we plan for the future?

These messages often seem simple but they can dictate your emotional wellbeing. Some people work tirelessly to save each and every penny so that they can have their ideal future. These same people often do not enjoy the simple pleasures of life due to being focused on the future. On the other hand, there are individuals who enjoy each and every day while not focusing on their future. These individuals often experience stress from tomorrow's obstacles.

My magic formula is to create a healthy plan for your future that allows you to enjoy your journey. I want you today to focus on your lifestyle and how your philosophical approach to life is impacting your stress.

Let's start with identifying your approach to life:

- I focus more on my five, ten or even twenty-year plan then I do on my one-year plan?

True or False

- I often become anxious, stressed, or even upset with managing my finances?

True or False

- I live day by day without a real plan or structure?

True or False

- I have a long-term plan and do not focus on my triumphs or accomplishments of today?

True or False

- The idea of planning my future is not my cup of tea?

True or False

When I think about building an approach to life that is healthy and long-term I think about the differences between my birth country, the Dominican Republic, and my home the United States of America. People in the Dominican Republic share the Caribbean lifestyle, which simply means enjoying the pleasures of today. I remember taking summer vacations back home and realizing how many people enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

I truly believe that these people mentioned above live in the present and because of that they enjoy a level of stress that most of us only dream of.

Consider when you are on vacation and “still working”. Yes, still working. You know exactly what

I'm talking about. Most people that take vacations tend to work while on vacation.

You may pull out one to two hours per day or every other day versus a full eight-hour work day.

The crazy thing is that while on vacation you often do experience stress, worry or anxiety from work or life.

- Why?
- What has changed?

Let's consider 2 major changes: mindset and prioritization.

Mindset

While on vacation you build a mindset that is often tailored to your past experiences when taking vacations, what you read about vacations, and your understanding of vacations. You may experience the following mindsets:

- During vacations people are able to relax, feel at ease or have a good time without worry about their "other" life.
- During vacations people are able to escape their work and daily obligations. This inclines people to feel emotionally stable and experience less stress.

Your Mindset:

A simple way to look at your mindset is to consider how you approach different things in your life. Let's take a question that you and I will work through.

How do you plan for your day?

I plan for my day by doing the following.

“I plan for my day by creating a to-do-list in the morning right when I wake up. I normally wake up and grab my cell phone. I add the to-do-list on my notes application. The to-do-list always has two sections. Section 1: tasks that I want to complete today and Section 2: tasks that I want to complete today but may have to pushed to tomorrow. I have two sections on the to-do-list because I need tasks that I know I can complete during that day and tasks that I need to continue to focus on. In addition, the to-do-list provides organization, scheduling, and micromanagement.”

Did you noticed how in-depth I went when discussing my plan for the day. The reason I did this is because it represents my mindset. It represents the approach that I strive to apply in all areas of life. Reflect on the following questions:

- Did you feel that your answer was not sufficient?
- Is your mindset delivering the results you want?
- Do you want to change your mindset?
- What are the pros about your mindset?
- What are the cons about your mindset?

Your answer to the questions above will depict what you do next. If you feel that your mindset is solid, great. Move on to the habits. If not, lets focus on tweaking your mindset to deliver better results.

Changing a mindset is not easy, but you can do it. Over the years, I have developed a clear, straightforward and effective 3 step platform.

- Step 1: Understanding your mindset.
- Step 2: Identifying a new mindset.
- Step 3: Practicing your new mindset.

Step 1

“Understanding your mindset” was discussed earlier when going over the question “How do you plan for your day?”. To take this a step further, I want you to consider others areas of your life through questions and answers. The focus is on identifying as many approaches that you take in life and investigating if they are effective, stress relieving, and providing you with healthy outcomes. Examples of questions to answer and review include:

- When I plan for my future, my approach is ____.
- I manage my finances by ____.
- I manage my day to day schedule by ____.
- I am on track with my 6 month goals ____.
- I am on track with my 1 year goals ____.

Remember, it’s your life. There are endless questions that you can go review. I’ve only provided you with a few that should only open your doors.

Step 2

“Identifying a new mindset” starts with first completing step 1. You truly want to have a solid understanding of your current mindset in order to work towards a better healthier mindset. If you skip step 1, you may create new mindsets that are similar to your original mindset. In addition, you may relapse due to not holding a strong foundation on the new mindset.

I want you to review the answers to the questions in step 1. Try to answer them in a better way. If you feel stuck, that’s okay. Let’s work on the problem.

Below are different strategies that you can implement to help identify a new healthy mindset.

- Ask a friend, peer or family member for support. Let them answer the questions and see if you like their answers better. I really want you to invest time into reviewing the answers you’ve obtained. One of my favorite methods for learning and growing is through communication. I genuinely enjoy and understand the value of learning from others. So much can be gained from a conversation.
- Change the approach that you are taking to answer your question. This is going to be fun and a little time consuming. Yet, well worth the reward. Start by returning to your question. Let’s use the question below as a model to work through together:

How do you plan your day?

Earlier, I answered the question by stating:

“I plan for my day by creating a to-do-list in the morning right when I wake up. I normally wake up and grab my cell phone. I add the to-do-list on my notes application. The to-do-list always has two sections. Section 1: tasks that I want to complete today and Section 2: tasks that I want to complete today but may have to push to tomorrow. I have two sections on the to-do-list because I need tasks that I know I can complete during that day and tasks that I need to continue to focus on. In addition, the to-do-list provides organization, scheduling, and micromanagement.”

Prioritization

While on vacation your day to day activities are often very different when compared to that of your regular life. On vacation you do not have to rush to your appointments or feel overwhelmed with life obligations.

Life on vacation is as if you have the remote to your television and pushed the slow speed button. Your days on vacation are easy going and most importantly provide you with time to reflect on your life. I think most people can say that while on vacation they are able to find more time to reflect on their life, goals, and where they currently are.

Earlier, I mentioned the importance of “living in the moment”. I also associated “living in the moment” with “vacations”. One thing I want you to remember is that living in the present means you can achieve a

more stable and healthier level of stress. But before you can actually live in the present you have to make changes to your lifestyle and mindset.

The entire focus of this book is to support you in living a life that decreases your stress and leads you to a healthier lifestyle.

Living in the present starts and ends with two major changes that you can implement into your life. Each of the changes will require you to devote time and energy into them in order to work towards creating a lifestyle that allows you to lower and manage your stress.

In order to create a foundation for the purpose of living a happier life and reducing your stress we must find what works for you. Consider the following questions and statements as you reflect on your lifestyle and life goals:

- Are you a morning person? If so, do you have your days organized so that you are most productive in the morning.
- Do you have some sort of accountability program that you utilize?
- When you are experiencing stress from your schedule how do you manage it?
- What tools do you use to reduce your stress?

If you struggled to find a clear answer to any of the questions above, it's okay. Each of us have our starting point, this is yours.

By now you probably get the idea that I love steps and sequences. Yes, I do. I am a believer in keeping things simple. Creating a prioritization platform that has great scheduling and organization can be daunting. Yet, I have a clear and simple step by step sequence on how you can do it.

Let's breakdown the wall and create something wonderful!

Phase 1:

Time to reflect on yourself, a.k.a. self-reflection. Once again review the following questions:

- Are you a morning person? If so, do you have your days organized so that you are most productive in the morning.
- Do you have some sort of accountability program that you utilize?
- When you are experiencing stress from your schedule how do you manage it?
- What tools do you use to reduce your stress?

This phase is going to simply require one thing.

In order to have a stress free day how would you need to schedule, organize and prioritize your day? Consider tomorrow. How would you apply this to tomorrow?

As tempted as you are, please be realistic. The day has to be a typical day. Consider a typical work day that has the usual tasks, chores, and responsibilities.

Phase 2:

At this point you should be considering what your ideal stress free day looks like.

Consider the following questions:

- What has to happen for you to experience a low stress day?
- What are the triggers that escalate your stress?
- What coping skills would you need to utilize in order to manage and eliminate your stress?

The answers to the questions above will guide you to preparing yourself for a low stress day.

Phase 3:

The final phase is all about implementation.

Make it a priority to implement the strategies learned today in the following days. As you implement today's strategies be conscious of how your stress, anxiety and worry shift. Remember, the goal is to achieve a life without stress.

Below are questions to consider as you implement the strategies discussed today. Review the questions as you practice what you have learned. The questions below will support you in understanding what works versus what you need to re-structure.

- Has stress decreased after implementing the strategies?
- How has stress changed?

- What coping skills are you utilizing to manage your stress?
- Are their triggers that continue to escalate your stress? If so, what are they?
- Jump to chapter 20. Read over the coping skills and see which you can implement to lower your stress.

Great job today.

You are utterly and totally wonderful.

Day 17: All About Emotions

Today is about understanding your emotions.

- Happiness.
- Anger.
- Sadness.

I'm sure that you are probably reading this and thinking "I know my emotions". You may feel that you are aware of what makes you happy or what causes you to experience sadness. The crazy thing is that, I'm sure you are aware of your emotions. I'm certain that you can pinpoint an experience and directly state which emotion you would experience. For instance, a birthday may incline you experience happiness, joy and laughter. While a conflict or argument can bring out frustration or anger.

Creating understanding to your emotions can provide you with the key to living a life that allows you to manage stress. Not rid yourself of stress. That is impossible. Awareness of your emotions will lead to you knowing how to manage your stress as stress is directly associated with emotions.

Consider the 5 step sequence:

1. You discuss wanting a pay raise with your family.

2. You approach your boss for a pay raise.
3. Your boss calls you randomly during the week to let you know that you did not get the pay raise.
4. You tell your family of the news.

Now let's add potential emotions someone may experience into the sequence:

1. You discuss wanting a pay raise with your family.
 - Happy. Enthusiastic. Eager. Excited. Nervous
2. You approach your boss for a job raise.
 - Nervous. Timid. Excited. Relieved.
3. Your boss calls you randomly during the week to let you know that you did not get the pay raise.
 - Sad. Frustrated. Angry. Upset.
4. You tell your family of the news.
 - Embarrassed. Sad. Frustrated. Upset. Nervous.

The above sequence is stereotypical for most people to experience. The emotions experienced throughout the sequence lead to experiencing stress, worry and anxiety. The stress that you experience from the sequence listed above can lead to further negative symptoms and behaviors.

Potential negative symptoms and behaviors include:

- Feeling worthless because you did not get the job raise or you are not moving up at the rate you expected.
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence.
- Experiencing lethargy due to the bad news.
- Taking out your anger or frustration on someone else. Maybe your spouse or close friends.
- Potentially channeling your stress from the experience towards alcohol or drugs as an unhealthy coping mechanism.
- Decreasing your work productive and effort.
- Depression.
- Overly anxious or nervous to bring up the pay raise subject again.

The symptoms listed above are very common. Creating understanding and awareness for your emotions can provide insight on how to handle a situation like the one discussed.

The solution to managing your emotions so that you will not experience the negative symptoms and behaviors listed above are in the approach discussed below. I want to encourage you to invest time and energy into understanding your emotions and emotional chain. By doing this, you will be able to manage the negative symptoms and behaviors.

Below is entirely made up model. I want to encourage you to understand that you can learn from the model and apply the content to your personal life.

Let's first start with a hypothetical case to focus on:

“You want to ask your boss for a pay raise”

At this point you have a target. The next 3 steps involve multiple formats of practice that will lead to you managing your stress.

Step One:

Spend 15 to 30 minutes alone going over the following questions:

- Why do I want a pay raise?
- Why do I deserve a pay raise?
- Reasons I may not receive a pay raise?
- How will I feel if I do receive the pay raise? Be sure to list your emotions/feelings.
- How will I feel if I don't receive the pay raise? Be sure to list your emotions/feelings.
- Who can support me when I experience not receiving the pay raise? Consider your current support system.
- How can I myself cope with not receiving the pay raise?
- How will I most likely react as a result of not receiving the pay raise? You may have to consider past experiences where you received bad news.

Step two:

Now that you have answered each of the questions. Let's take it one step further:

- How will my support system help me with receiving the bad news?

In order to answer the above question, you are going to have to communicate with your support system. Ask your friends, family or spouse "how they will support you with the bad news of not receiving your pay raise?" I want to encourage you to receive as much detail as possible. The more you know the better you will feel during the experience.

Important points to consider with your support system:

- The time and day that you will be asking for your pay raise. This way your support system is available for you and not caught off guard.
- Discuss with your support system communication topics. I understand that this may sound odd, yet I want you to go for it. You know yourself better than most. Consider which positive affirmation statements truly boost your spirit. These statement may be useful to your support system when helping you through the experience.
- Role play with your support system. Consider going through the bad news scenario. Drive to the locations that are planned. Practice communicating with each other.

- Create a plan of action if you do not receive your raise. A plan of action can be as detailed as you want it to be. The main goal is that you are leading the show in the plan and that the plan ends with a positive emotional experience.

For instance, your plan of action may include that after receiving the bad news you meet your friends at the batting cages because you love going to the batting cages. The batting cages always remind you of positive feelings. While at the batting cages you are able to spend time with your friends and receive support. The support can be delivered in different formats. Your friends may hug you, communicate with you or remind you that life is not over, it's just one bad moment. At the end of the experience you truly want to feel emotionally stable, happy, and grounded.

Step three:

At this point you should be feeling confident in your ability to manage your emotions when you receive the news, good or bad. I want to ask you to take it a little further. The reason is simple, you will be able to feel empowered and in control. You'll be in control of your emotions prior to the emotions taking place.

- Practice envisioning that you are going through the entire process. Each and every step. This process may take you 15 to 30 minutes to complete. Write down what you are feeling. Imagine what your bosses' office looks like, the smells, color of the walls, and office décor. Consider each and every detail that you can. This

strategy allows you to gain control over the situation and your stress.

- Practice with a peer. If possible your support system. Engage in a mock conversation that leads to each scenario.

The three steps discussed lead you through an entirely different emotional experience than the initial case discussed. Initially, you would have experienced negative feelings that would have led to unwanted stress. A type of stress that may have inclined you to experience negative behaviors and symptoms.

The second case, included a three step system that gave you empowerment and control. As a result of following the three step system you gained control over your emotions and empowerment in the situation prior to it taking place. The most important benefit is that you are able to manage your stress.

The three step system can be applied to just about any case that has a potential positive and negative outcome.

Day 18: The Awesome Power of Venting

Often we feel that our problems are that of our own and we individually as well as privately should be able to handle them. If not, then we at times feel inadequate in our ability to manage independently.

This mindset is strongly associated with individuals' upbringings and social expectations. Just as society expects high school graduates to spread their wings and grow independently, there is also an expectation that we should independently manage our own problems.

To an extent I believe and find this notion to be true and beneficial. I think it is vital for people to know how to manage their daily obstacles on their own. Yet, I also find that emotional release is important as it helps reduce and even eliminate stress related to the problem(s). Consider a basic problem that you may have had.

Let's say you got a flat tire while driving and as a result you decided to get out of the car to fix it.

More than likely you would have experienced some sort of stress from the experience. Potentially due to: running late, not wanting to get dirty, annoyed, frustrated, or anxious due to traffic. After fixing the problem you for some reason continue to think about

the experience. This thought process is directly what causes unwanted stress and if you keep it to yourself it can bring about negative symptoms.

Emotional release really means communicating with someone else other than yourself about what took place. In the situation above, the best case scenario would have been to communicate with someone about the experience. Even if it were just to brag about how awesome your mechanic skills were or how scary it was to change a tire while cars flew by behind you.

Often when people think about venting, they tend to picture someone sitting across from them in a dark room asking “so tell me how you feel?”. The irony is that I have been caught once or twice asking that very question. Yet, it is such a great question because it leads to this emotional vent. The emotional vent is what directly helps reduce or even manage stress.

When we try to do things on our own and continue to hold in more and more negative or problematic experiences, our stress rises. It’s like putting dirty laundry under the rug, sooner or later, it’s going to show its ugly face. If you have been holding in your problems and not communicating, the best time to do it is now. Making this change means that you no longer have to hold in the dirty laundry. You can experience a satisfying release that will lower your stress and eliminate its negative symptoms.

Common symptoms of stress that you may experience as a result of not talking about your problems:

- You may feel easily agitated or annoyed after the stressful situation. Even more annoyed if you do not talk about it.
- You may feel sad or down because you are the only person that knows about the problem or stress inducing experience.
- The day may seem long, painful and exhausting.
- You may feel alone. Alone because you do not want to talk about it or because you fear being judged by others.

Venting or releasing your feelings may feel foreign to you, as something that is odd, eccentric and simply uncomfortable. For these reasons, I want you to know that it truly works. People continue to experience hands down awesome results from it. Your stress, anxiety, worry and emotional pain can be diminished and managed through the simple yet powerful strategy of communication.

I'm sure that what makes the process of venting difficult is that it is new to you and that you are not comfortable doing it. Earlier in the book, I discussed the importance of developing a healthy mindset. A mindset that can lead you to achieve a stress free and happy lifestyle. Today, we are working on emotional release in order to chop away daily stress that you are holding on to.

To make this process smooth and friendly to you, we have to shift gears. I want you to lead the show and

find what works for you. Reflect on the following questions:

- I feel most comfortable speaking with _____.
- I feel most comfortable discussing my feelings when I am at _____ and with _____.
- How long of a time period would I want to spend talking about my problem(s) or stress?
- I prefer sitting, standing or doing an activity during the time I am discussing my feelings or problem(s)?
- I prefer phone, face to face, email, video, snail mail, or text to discuss my feelings or problem(s)?
- I want the person I am speaking with to communicate or listen?

The questions above are aimed to give you control over the process which you will like. I'm sure that after reading the questions you felt empowered and just a little bit more comfortable with the idea of discussing your stress or problem(s).

Again, I want to stress the importance of emotional release as it directly enhances your ability to manage daily stress. After you have reviewed the questions above, find a handful of people that you can go to. Start small to test the waters and how well you do with the process. You can do this by identifying one small problem or stressor that has taken place today.

Below are steps to help you with the process:

- Step 1: Write down the small problem or stressor.
- Step 2: Consider how it has impacted you. What are the symptoms that you experienced? Reflect on the emotional and physical symptoms.
- Step 3: Consider the following questions during this step:
 - Who are you going to contact?
 - How are you going to contact them?
 - How long do you plan to communicate?
 - The overall goal after the conversation.

This step provides you with mental focus and awareness on the process that will take place. In addition, the process gives you control as you are leading it. Remember, stress and control do not like each other. So when you have control you are winning over stress.

- Step 4: At this point you are releasing your feelings and emotions to your support person.
- Step 5: Post conversation with support person. Reflect on how you feel emotionally and physically.
 - Have the symptoms decreased or increased?
 - Do you feel better?
 - Do you feel in control over the problem or stress?
 - Did the process help?

- Step 6: This is the maintenance step in which you lead the show. Consider if there are changes that need to be made in order to help you relinquish additional stress.

- Will changing your support person help?
- Will changing the form of communication utilized help? Cell phone versus email.
- Will communicating in a form that allows you to vent and your support person to listen, be more effective?

All of these questions and more should be carefully analyzed in order to further reduce your daily stress.

I'm really hoping that at this point, many of the strategies and recommendations discussed have not overwhelmed you. To be honest, they are literally taken out of my sessions, lectures, and research. Over and over, the platforms discussed in this book have assisted individuals, couples and families with stress.

One of the main differences that I have yet to discuss is the platform of a session versus a book. Normally if you were my client, we would have more face to face sessions that would be scheduled consistently. I would have a closer grasp on your growth, changes, and overall success. With the book, you are entirely self-driven. I trust that you picked this book because you wanted to kick your stress right in the behind. Great! I ask that you invest and commit to this book in order to reap the awesome benefits.

Day 19: The Chain of Reaction

Every time we do something there will be some sort of reaction to it. Today the focus is on understanding the chain of reaction from your actions.

Why is this important you ask?

Great question!

Consider how many times you experienced some sort of curve ball in life and experienced an uncontrolled negative reaction. Maybe you experienced a job loss and broke down in tears or the opposite, in total anger. As a result of the job loss you did not manage your emotions in the best fashion and your reaction resulted in negative stress.

I remember my first year in graduate school taking an intro counseling course. The course was difficult, yet I made it my goal to make all A's. I really wanted to achieve a high level of satisfaction and perfection. On my first few exams, I did not do so hot. As a result, I contemplated with my wife if the school and program were right for me. I reached out to my professors asking for support. I had trouble sleeping and experienced way too much stress. I remember my stress being so high that even when I was studying for upcoming exams, I could not stop thinking about my first exams that I struggled on.

It was not a good journey for me.

How I wish I knew then what I know now.

As I mentioned earlier, today the focus is on understanding the chain of reactions as a result of some sort of experience. The best and most effective way to proceed is to identify one situation that that you did not deal well with. It is important that you are able to highlight an experience that you “did not deal with well” and that “caused bad stress”.

Below I am going to walk you through a proven sequence made up of 5 phases. For best results always start at phase 1. As you gain knowledge and awareness on how to move through the phases you will be able to complete the process in a smooth fashion.

Before beginning the phases write down and identify one experience that really sticks out to you.

Phase 1:

Time to buckle down and really think about the past experience that left you feeling stressed. Reflect on the following statements below:

- Write down anything and everything that you remember from that experience.
- Write down how you felt prior to the experience.
- Write down how you felt after the experience.
- What were the physical symptoms?
- What were the emotional symptoms?

- How did you, that day, handle the situation and deal with your stress?

Phase 2:

Time to create an awesome stress relieving action plan. I want to coach you as if you and I were sitting in my office. In phase 1, you identified the entire experience. Now let's look at the chain of reaction in a step by step sequence.

Step 1: You “may” have had prior thoughts or feelings regarding the upcoming experience.

This step is a hit or miss for some people. I've always felt that knowing is better than not knowing. During different times in life you may experience something that was pre planned. For instance, a job loss. You may have had a few weeks or even months that lead up to the job loss in which you knew that losing your job was possibility. Being aware of something “not so good” happening can increase the potency of the experience, the emotional chain of reactions, and the stress.

Again this step is not for everyone. If you relate to it, please keep it in mind moving forward.

Step 2: The experience took place.

Step 3: You experienced the reaction in the form of symptoms.

During this step it is important to write down and consider all of the symptoms that you experienced. Think about physical symptoms such as hand tremors, sweaty neck, hands or back, cold chills, or watery

eyes. Consider emotional symptoms such as wanting to leave as soon as possible, avoiding thoughts related to the experience, sadness, anger, frustration, or even anxiety.

Step 4: The symptoms lead to stress.

At this point, you are experiencing stress from the experience. The main differences between step 3 and 4 is that the symptoms in step 3 progress into stress.

This step is one that we really do not want to be at. No one enjoys stress!

Phase 3:

This is the action phase that requires you to practice imagery. Basically imagine yourself going through the newly created action plan and identifying if you think it will work. Please feel free to jump to day 20 to read all about the awesome power of imagery.

Before initiating the action plan, let's discuss strategies that can be inserted into the four step system discussed earlier. To make the process simple and practical, please write down as much of the content as possible. Realistically what we are going over is as simple as riding a bike. During your first trials the process seems overwhelming, scary and a bit much. However, after investing time and practice it will become second nature to you. Something like an instinct.

This phase requires that the 4 step system discussed earlier has strategies to alleviate the negative symptoms experienced, the stress, and even stop the

process from taking place. How great would that be? Imagine if you could just eliminate the entire negative symptoms and unwanted stress after today's read! It's possible.

Below, we are going to walk side by side and go through the 4 step system discussed above. The main difference is that each step will have a combating strategy to diminish the negative symptoms and stress. For clarity purposes, the strategies will be labeled as "supportive tools".

Step 1: You "may" have had prior thoughts or feelings regarding the upcoming experience.

Supportive tool for Step 1:

If you are starting at step 1 then you already have an idea of something "not so good" happening. Instead, of continuing to dwell on it, work to create a meaningful action plan that can alleviate your stress, change your focus and create happiness. In the case that we are discussing, the topic is "job loss".

Instead of continuing to focus on, "will I get fired" or "are they going to let me go". Work to use the potential change as an opportunity of growth and empowerment. Consider the statements and questions below:

- Are their jobs that are less stressful for me to apply to?
- Create a resume, cover letter, and begin the steps to change jobs instead of someone else forcing you to do it. The awesome thing about

this is that you have control and empowerment over the change, versus someone else. When we are given control, our minds feel more confident and at ease with the process versus when someone else has the control over our life.

- Contact friends and colleagues in the area for employment support.
- Communicate with your spouse, significant other or support system on what is taking place.
- Release your emotions in a healthy way to decrease your stress. Revisit day 18 to review on the venting and emotional release.
- Create multiple 6-month to 1 year plans that you are not stressed by and are happy with.

Overall, this strategy puts the ball in your court from the start. You have control over your happiness and stress.

Step 2: The experience took place.

Supportive tool for step 2:

The experience will always take place and this is a fact that you are going to have to accept and create a positive mindset around.

In this case, the experience is the potential job loss. Instead of contemplating and increasing your stress on whether it will happen or not, transition your mindset. A change to your mindset in this scenario starts with transitioning your thoughts from “am I going to lose my job” to “I am very marketable and

have lots of job leads available” or “I’m going to start the process of seeking employment today rather than waiting to see what happens”. Revisit days 14 and 16 to reflect on creating a healthy mindset.

More examples of statements that can create a healthy mindset include:

- I am ready to find a job that I love and do not stress over.
- I am going to prepare myself for the change.
- I have so many people around me that can help support me through the process.
- I am very experienced and knowledgeable in what I do; this is something that employers value.

Once you achieve a healthy change in mindset, your stress and overall happiness will be optimal. Also, and in case you are already thinking about it, what if I do not lose my job, will all the planning and preparation be for no reason?

Absolutely not.

The preparation and planning is for the sole purpose of understanding how you react on an emotional level as a result of an experience. Through the process that we are discussing you are able to gain further skills that support you in alleviating your stress, creating a healthy mindset, and dealing with life obstacles that often lead to stress.

Step 3: You experienced the reaction in the form of symptoms.

Supportive tool for step 3:

At this point you should have all your symptoms both physical and emotional written down or at least in mind. I want you to consider coping skills that you can use to combat your symptoms. To make things clear and easy to follow, I am going to utilize the symptoms that we have discussed with potential coping skills that manage and even eliminate negative symptoms. The example below is just that, an example. You can pick and choose coping skills that are discussed here and throughout the book to support you.

Physical symptom: sweaty neck, hands or back.

Acceptable coping skills to combat the physical symptoms:

- Deep breathing. For this exercise, begin by inhaling through your nose for a duration of 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds and exhale through your mouth for a duration of 4 seconds. Practice this four times. You should work to involve your entire body during the breathing exercise. While inhaling suck your stomach in and pull your chest up. Overall, you should feel a sense of relaxation and distraction after the experience. Do this as often as needed or until you notice that you are no longer sweating and are not focused on the negative experience.

- Muscle relaxation. Pick one muscle group that you want to focus on. Let's say it's your right hand. Squeeze your right hand as hard and tight as you can for a duration that last 4 seconds. Release your hand in a smooth slow duration that lasts 8 seconds. You want your hand to be entirely open when you get to second number 8. Practice this four times. Overall, your goal is to feel the contraction as you squeeze and the subtle relaxation as you open your hand. Do this as often as needed or until you notice that you are no longer sweating and are not focused on the negative experience.

- Writing down positive statements. Earlier I provided you with the following statements that can be utilized to create a positive mindset and now alleviate negative symptoms.

- I am ready to find a job that I love and do not stress over.

- I am going to prepare myself for the change.

- I have so many people around me that can help support me through the process.

- I am very experienced and knowledgeable in what I do; this is something that employers value.

- Contacting your support system. Pick up a phone or text, one of your trusted support persons who you know can help you with the presenting symptoms. Before you call really consider who can help you.

For me, it's my wife. She is very good at helping me step back from the hole I have put myself in. While speaking with her, I am able to feel more confident, empowered, reassured, and before I know it my symptoms have diminished. It's honestly pretty awesome what a simple conversation can do.

Step 4: The symptoms lead to stress.

Supportive tool for step 4:

If you have followed the process discussed, you should not be here. Yet, let's just say life really decided to mess with you and threw you a 90 mile per hour curve ball that left you crossed eyed. I'm talking about Randy Johnson on the mound throwing his stinky cheese. Okay, you get my point.

If you are here, it's okay. You did nothing wrong and everything right. Simply go back to the step 1 and truly reflect if you added enough information. Visit step 3 and practice different coping skills. After you have gone back, you should be able to have stopped at step 3.

Remember, today focused on understanding the chain of emotions that lead to your stress as a result of an experience. We all have good and bad days. The bad days often increase the likely hood of experiencing negative symptoms and stress.

Day 20: Secret Cheat Sheet

Today we are going to focus on creating a cheat sheet that you can always utilize when experiencing stress. The undeniable truth is that you are going to experience stress and forgot how to manage it.

The moment may be a break up with your long time significant other or losing a job. During these moments that life, oh sweet life, will continue to present us. We need a source that can always provide support. A cheat sheet that can provide empowerment over daily daily stress, worry and anxiety.

Before I begin, I want to encourage you to consider it as a cheat sheet. A cheat sheet is something that you use during difficult times when you have exercised all other resources. The recommendations and platforms discussed throughout the book provide you with a sound foundation on managing and controlling your anxiety, stress and worry.

The cheat sheet consists of the following strategies:

- Deep breathing.
- Exercising.
- Muscle relaxation.
- Visualization.

Deep breathing:

Most people probably say that they are “good” at breathing when under difficult situations. Consider a sudden shock in the form of news or maybe an accident took place right in front of you. I’m assuming that you would feel comfortable in this situation to practice controlled and healthy breathing.

Although, you may feel competent in this area. I eagerly encourage you to learn how to truly breathe in a fashion that tames your stress, anxiety and worry for just about any given situation.

Breathing has two important parts.

1. Focusing on the actual breathing.
2. Feeling how the breathing has changed your mental and physical state.

Right here and now, I want you to give yourself a personal investment. Take 4 minutes to practice a new and more effective breathing platform.

Step 1: Inhale through your nose for a duration that last 4 seconds. Be sure to count the four seconds to yourself.

Step 2: Hold in the respiration for a duration that last 4 seconds. Be sure to count the four seconds to yourself.

Step 3: Exhale through your mouth for a duration that last 4 seconds. Be sure to count the four seconds to yourself.

Step 4: Repeat steps 1, 2, and 3 for four cycles.

Reflect on the following questions after completing the four steps.

- How did you feel prior to beginning the exercise?
- How did you feel during the exercise?
- Did you notice yourself transition your focus away from the problem and to breathing and counting?
- How do you feel now, after completing the exercise?

Let's take this exercise one step further. Reflect on any previous stressful or anxiety experience that has taken place. It can be any of your choosing. Just pick one.

Consider the questions regarding the experience:

- What was the experience?
- How did you feel prior to the experience?
- How did you feel emotionally and physically during the experience?
- What was it like physically and emotionally after the experience?

Please take time to truly answer the questions above as if you were reliving the experience. At this point you should have an understanding of how to utilize the breathing exercise as well as how to process through past experiences. I understand that reflecting and reliving past experiences is difficult, yet I want to

encourage you to consider how vital it is to create self-awareness and grow from your experiences.

Consider the past experience you discussed earlier for the exercise below:

Again, I am going to ask you to invest another four minutes. Please read each of the steps before acting on them.

Step 1: Close your eyes and picture yourself in the stressful situation you mentioned earlier. Picture yourself right when the situation took place. Think about your physical and emotional symptoms.

Step 2: At this point you should have your eyes closed and really be feeling your symptoms. The stress, worry, heavy breathing or other reactions you may have.

Step 3: Inhale through your nose for a duration that last 4 seconds. Be sure to count the four seconds to yourself.

Step 4: Hold in the respiration for a duration that last 4 seconds. Be sure to count the four seconds to yourself.

Step 5: Exhale through your mouth for a duration that last 4 seconds. Be sure to count the four seconds to yourself.

Step 6: Repeat steps 3, 4, and 5 for four cycles.

Step 7: Open your eyes and reflect on the questions below.

- Did the exercise prove more effective than what you did in the past?
- Did exercise help you manage your stress and experience control over the situation?

Understand that you have processed through a hypothetical scenario. Although you have not tried it yet in your personal life, it is effective. This same exercise, I continue to utilize in my practice as a supportive tool to empower people who experience stress, worry and anxiety driven experiences.

Exercising:

Now let's focus on utilizing exercise to lower stress not just for fitness purposes.

Most people say that they exercise and are living a healthy lifestyle. I believe it to an extent. I want to question you on your understanding of how exercise associates with your stress, worry or anxiety. Often people think that by simply exercising, stress or the bad symptoms are going to be managed.

I am a huge fan of awareness. I love to know how things affect other things. In this case how exercise can help tame or even take away the bad symptoms brought on by stress, worry or an anxiety driven experience. This is important because you may be working to control or manage your stress with only 10 or 20 percent effectiveness.

What if you could engage in the exercises that you love while completely taming the bad symptoms brought on by stress?

Consider if you had a horrible day due to nothing going your way. You were late to work, forgot your lunch, went over your phones data plan, and just to top the list you sat on pee while using the restroom. What a bad day, huh?

I'm assuming that now when you have bad or stressful days you exercise. Maybe you are an elliptical person and pound out 30 minutes on the machine to help relieve your stress. Or you are really into heavy weights, so you put on heavy iron to brush off the stressful day.

Can you give me your attention and allow me to help you?

I want you to try the strategy discussed below because I am pretty sure that after your exercise you continue to experience some of the bad symptoms from the bad day. Most people do. What tends to happen is that people only know how to utilize exercise as a full-time distraction and part-time stress reliever. The strategy discussed below educates you on understanding how you can make exercise your full-time stress reliever.

Distractions are great, but they do not last and they do not provide a solution.

I want you to think about a stressful day in which you sought exercise to help relieve your stress:

- What happened during the bad day to make it a bad day?
- How did you feel that day?

- Describe the emotional and physical symptoms?
- How did you feel prior to exercising?
- How did you feel during the exercise?
- Describe your symptoms after exercising?
- Rate your stress from (0 to 10) 10 being the highest when you started to have a stressful day?
- Rate your stress from (0 to 10) 10 being the highest at the end of the day?

If you are able to rate your stress at a “4” or lower at the end of the day, I think you are “okay” to skip this strategy. I will however, encourage you to read on for self-awareness and education. It honestly would not hurt you in any way to learn how to bring your stress down to a “0”.

In order to manage the stress or worry you are having as a result of the negative experience we must first learn how to utilize exercising in a more therapeutic fashion. Earlier the topics visualization and deep breathing were discussed. These two strategies are what will create the foundation to taming your stress, worry or anxiety.

Below is a list of recommendations that you can apply to your exercise. These recommendations help to relieve your symptoms.

To keep things simple and clear, let's focus on the previous stressful example that you described earlier.

Step 1: After you have experienced your stressful trigger, practice the deep breathing strategy discussed in the chapter. Allow the deep breathing strategy to be your first defense in managing your symptoms. The goal at this point for you to have experienced the negative stressful trigger and tamed your symptoms. You should be able to continue on your day with limited bad thoughts and feelings that are related to the experience. At times the experience can be overwhelmingly difficult and because of this, you will need a second line of defense.

Step 2: Your second line of defense, is visualization. I want you to visualize the rest of your day in positive thoughts. In addition, visualize yourself going through your workout. Below are examples of questions that you can reflect on. The questions are directed to support your ability to manage the stress driven experience.

- What are things that you are going to be doing the rest of the day prior to exercising?
- Which machines or exercises do you plan on doing? And how do you think the exercises will help alleviate your stress, worry or anxiety.

For the sequence below let's focus on the muscle group (right bicep).

Step 1: Squeeze your right bicep for a duration that lasts four seconds. Be sure that you are actively squeezing the muscle group for the entire duration.

Step 2: Release the tension that you have created for a duration that lasts 8 seconds. You should be in full relaxation at the end of the 8 second count.

Step 3: Repeat steps 1 and 2 for four cycles.

- How did you feel prior to beginning the exercise?
- How did you feel during the exercise?
- Did you notice yourself transition your focus away from the world and towards breathing and counting?
- How do you feel now, after completing the exercise?

Now let's take this exercise one step forward. Reflect on any previous stressful or anxiety experience that has taken place. It can be any of your choosing. Just pick one.

Consider the questions regarding the stressful or anxiety experience:

- What was the experience?
- How did you feel prior to the experience?
- How did you feel emotionally and physically during the experience?
- What was it like physically and emotionally after the experience?
- What symptoms did you experience as a result of the experience?

Please take time to truly answer the questions as if you were reliving it.

At this point you should have an understanding of how to utilize the basics of the deep breathing exercise as well as how to walk yourself through past experiences. I understand that reflecting and reliving past experiences is difficult, yet I want to encourage you to consider how vital it is to create self-awareness and grow from your experiences. Remember the goal is to reduce stress.

Consider the past experience you discussed earlier for the exercise below:

Again, I am going to ask you to invest another four minutes to yourself. Please read each of the steps before acting on them.

Step 1: Close your eyes and picture yourself in the stressful situation you mentioned earlier. Picture yourself right when the situation took place. Think about your physical and emotional symptoms. Write them down if you have to.

Step 2: At this point you should have your eyes closed and really be feeling on your symptoms. The stress, worry, heavy breathing or whatever reactions you may have experienced.

Step 3: Squeeze your right bicep for a duration that lasts four seconds. Be sure that you are actively squeezing the muscle group for the entire duration.

Step 4: Release the tension that you have created for a duration that lasts 8 seconds. You should be in full relaxation at the end of the 8 second count.

Step 5: Repeat steps 4 and 5 for four cycles.

Step 6: Open your eyes and reflect on the questions below.

- After completing the exercise above, can you say that it helped you deal with the situation better?
- Did the exercise help you manage your stress and experience control over the situation?
- Did the exercise reduce your symptoms?

Muscle relaxation or muscle squeezing is an awesome exercise that directly combats stressful and anxiety driven experiences. You can utilize this exercise at just about any situation in which you feel yourself becoming stressed, worried or in which you start to experience symptoms that are associated to stress.

Let's move on to visualization.

Visualization is just a fancy term for thinking about what is about to happen. This skill trains our mind and body to anticipate good and bad scenarios. This process also gives us control and empowerment, which as mentioned earlier help strengthen our ability to lower stress, anxiety and worry. Effectively using visualization will help to make potential stressful situations not stressful. Yes, it is that easy.

When I think about visualization, I always go back to when I proposed to my wife. I like to think of it to be a potential Nicolas Spark's movie. Wishful thinking. The day I proposed to my wife, seemed more like a stretched out month. From going with my mom to pick out the ring to planning the details of the proposal. I was to say the least stressed, nervous, anxious and a little scared. Looking back, not sure what I was scared about or even stressed over. My wife and I had a few too many conversations about being married and having kids prior to the proposal. So in reality I should have already known that she would say yes.

For story purposes only, I'll fill you in. I ended up proposing to my wife on her birthday which fell on Father's Day. You see, the thing about my wife is that she is really good at anticipating things. Anytime I try to get her a surprise or do something secret for her, she knows. She often knows what I'm going to do before I even do it. It's pretty cool and upsetting at times. I proposed to my wife under the pretense that the day was about her birthday and Father's Day. So technically, I had two covering platforms to hide my true intentions. A win for me!

Let's gather ourselves again. I kind of went off track there in memory lane. If at the time of my proposal I would have utilized visualization, many of my stressors and worries would have decreased.

To effectively use visualization in your life, you are going to have to understand its platform. Truly, nothing you can't handle. There are just a few basics to comprehend. Before you engage in the activity

below, I want you to consider one stressful experience that happened to you. The 4 step sequence below will walk you through in slow motion, this way you can gain a strong understanding of how to effectively utilize the technique in your life.

The first two steps go over the stressful experience that you have identified. The following steps begin the platform for utilizing visualization in lowering your stress. After reviewing the entire step sequence, you should be able to in future experiences skip steps 1 and 2 and go right to step 3.

Step 1: Write down the stressful experience.

Step 2: Review the statements below and answer the questions:

- Why was the experience stressful?
- What were the symptoms (physical and emotional)?
- How did you handle the experience?

During this step try to focus on your total reaction as a result of the experience.

Step 3: Reflect on the stressful experience in step 1. Imagine that you could go back to that very day and you knew that you were about to walk into that experience. All I want you to do at this point and in this step is to picture yourself thinking about having to experience it. Nothing else.

Step 4: This is the preparation step. Time to start working on identifying strategies that can give you

control and help you manage your stress. Below are some of the strategies that have been discussed in this book and that you can use in this activity.

- Practice your deep breathing and muscle relaxation with the entire focus being on concentration and visualization. After you go through each of the exercises, you should be calm and focused. At this point, I want you to think about the experience that you are going to have. Picture yourself going through it and anticipate that you will experience stress, worry or anxiety. During the times that you do experience these negative things practice the deep breathing and muscle relaxation you have mastered.

- If you can engage in some sort of exercise prior to the stressful experience. I want you to identify why exercising will help you with the upcoming experience. You can write a list of all the positive things about it. In addition, I want you to remember the exercising experience for later. The reason is simple. Once you are engaged and experiencing the stressful situation, you can picture yourself going through your fitness workout. Reflect on the exercises and machines that you did. Think about how good you felt. Reflect on the deep respirations and the positive energy you had while working out. The goal is to transfer that knowledge and experience to the current situation you are in. Overall, helping to alleviate the stress and negative symptoms.

- Call a support person or trusted person. Remember you are visualizing yourself going through the experience and have a good idea of potential symptoms that you may experience. Contact someone you can vent to or that you can receive support from. Tell them what may happen and how you plan to deal with it. By going over the process in a communicative format you are further enhancing your ability to control the situation. In addition, you can ask for support. Ask for constructive feedback or question if you can contact your friend during the experience for emergency support. By having someone available, you will feel secured and empowered.

Step 5: Time to practice. The only way to know if the strategies in step 4 are effective for you is through active practice. Next time you have an upcoming potential stressful experience utilize the 4 step sequence to visualization. The goal is to lower your stress and create control over your stress, worry or anxiety.

If for the oddest reason, the strategies above do not work. It's okay. There is a backup plan. Go back through the practice of steps 1 through 4 with the goal being to add more detail. Try to pair one or more of the strategies listed in step 4 together in different orders. Its honestly okay if you have all the strategies in your back pocket. Doesn't matter one bit! The goal is for you receive support from it.

You have reached your goal.

Today is day 20 and I could not be more proud of you. I truly hope that you have gained understanding of your stress and a path for taming stress, worry and anxiety. As you are well aware, stress will continue to show its ugly face. Use this book as an aid through life when you find yourself struggling to manage stress.

Thank you so much for reading my book.