

INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

LEADERS & SUCCESS

6 Ways To Ease Work Pressures And Excel



Trying harder while under pressure at work is often counterproductive.
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MICHAEL MINK

We all want to be at our best when work matters most, but sometimes as the pressure mounts people get in their own way and perform far below their capabilities.

That's from Judd Hoekstra, co-author with Rick Peterson of "Crunch Time: How To Be Your Best When It Matters Most." Hoekstra is also a vice president at The Ken Blanchard Companies, a premier leadership training and coaching company.

"Professional athletes, entertainers, Navy SEALs and CEOs have learned to calm themselves by reframing pressure from a threat to an opportunity," he said. "And you can too."

Tips on coming through:

Laugh. Finding humor in pressure-packed circumstances helps stop the stress hormone cortisol and releases endorphins — "the feel-good neurotransmitter that enhances performance," Hoekstra says.

Ease up. Don't try harder, Hoekstra says, "Try easier!"

Trying harder under pressure is often counterproductive. "Many examples, across a number of fields — athletic, military and business — show that trying harder leads to a decline in performance," he observed.

"Think about your best performances. Were you grinding and full of anxiety?" Hoekstra asked. "More than likely, you remember your best performances as almost effortless."

Change your perspective. Most people base their confidence about an upcoming performance on their most recent one, Hoekstra has found. When they perform well they're confident, but when they don't they aren't.

"The obvious drawback of this approach is that performance fluctuates, in some cases based on conditions outside your control," he pointed out. "Consider the great confidence a young Navy SEAL takes with him into battle, even if he has no combat experience. The SEAL's confidence is based upon his intense preparation and skill acquisition, not upon his prior performance in battle."

Track exertion. Sheer mental and physical exhaustion is counterproductive to maximum performance, says Christian Marcolli, author of "The Melting Point: How To Stay Cool And Sustain World-Class Business Performance." He's also an accomplished performance coach of world-class athletes and founder of Marcolli Executive Excellence, a management consulting firm.

"Keep a log for three days, and note when you're worn out, and what the conditions were," he advised. "A pattern will emerge that will reveal some bad habits contributing to that state of exhaustion. For instance: Instead of lunch you had a tense meeting, or drank two cups of strong coffee after a rough night's sleep. You took a tricky phone call underprepared," etc.

Start swapping out those counterproductive habits for better ones, he said, "and begin to build a routine that's dedicated to saving energy for the crunch times."

Isolate. Meltdowns are often triggered when we feel like we've gotten nowhere and our frustration peaks, Marcolli says.

He suggests blocking out two 40-minute chunks of time daily to focus on one key task with no interruptions. That way you guarantee that you get something accomplished with a strategic impact, even if your time was spent in meetings, helping others, etc.

Disconnect. Marcolli says he's worked with power brokers and champion athletes who can't get a good night's sleep because they take their work home literally and figuratively.

"When you're home after work, put the tablet, the laptop, the smartphone in another room and close the door," Marcolli recommended. "Stay off the screens for 90 minutes. Ideally you should do this every day. Make this a key principle you only break if there's a true business emergency. We all need to protect our private space. Which also means no devices in the bedroom.

"It's important to create an end-of-the-day ritual that enables you to clear your head," he said. "It sets you up for internal calm and a really high-quality, rejuvenating sleep."

Summon your ingenuity. Hall of Fame baseball pitcher Tom Glavine told Hoekstra that he only had his best pitches working on the mound in 20% of his starts.

The lesson? "When you aren't feeling it," Hoekstra said, "dig in and learn to win with what you do have in that moment."