

Facilitator — February/March 2016



Stress is the Enemy

Richard Flint

5 keys to learning to relax

Recently I asked a young man named Alex to define the word “relax” for me. He looked at me with puzzlement and just stared at me for a few moments.

“I’m not sure what it means,” he said. “It’s one of my great challenges in life. I find it very difficult to relax. It seems my mind is always working, and I can’t seem to turn it off.”

The more we talked, the more he understood what his inability to relax did to him mentally, emotionally and physically. It made it hard for him to focus, left him emotionally exhausted and kept him physically tired.

Alex is like so many people today who find it challenging to relax. Each day, they find themselves wrestling with all that life is handing them. But the ability to relax is one of the ways you learn to control your stress level.

In working with human behavior, I find most people don’t know how to unwind. You know this as well as I do: Wind anything tight enough, and it will break!

Understanding how to relax is critical to your mental, emotional and physical health. Here are five keys I have found that can help you learn to relax.

Key #1: Rest

If you aren’t rested, it will be exceedingly challenging to relax. Your body needs rest. During sleep, you allow your mind and your emotions to calm down. When you are sleeping, you are physically recharging. Getting enough “good” sleep is critical to you feeling relaxed.

Resting is more than just sleeping. It is also engaging in some mindless action that allows you to get lost in the feeling of nothingness. It’s finding that space where you can turn the world off and just lose yourself in the moment. It could be reading a book, working in the yard, working on a hobby or just vegging out in front of the TV. It is simply a space and time where you step outside your world of stress and find that spot where life just “is.”

Relaxation demands that you rest. Without rest, you will always feel tired, anxious and overwhelmed.

Key #2: Exercise

For many people, exercise is something they are going to do, not something they are doing. It is something they know will help them unwind, but there is so much to get done, they never quite get to it.

Learn this lesson well: Most of us spend our time collecting emotional clutter, rather than releasing it. Many of you have heard me talk about your “internal garbage can.” We go through our days collecting emotional residue and depositing it in that internal garbage can. We’re too busy to empty it and so, at some point, it becomes full. You can’t relax with your internal garbage can full. You live on edge, little things become big things, it is challenging for you to rest and you never seem to be able to get caught up. When that happens, the lid is going to blow off. Anyone around you is going to feel the full force of every emotional item that was in that can.

Exercise is one of the best ways to empty that internal garbage can. It will calm you down. It is a way to mentally, emotionally and physically unwind and dump the can. When you are exercising, it is a form of release. You will let go of things that are nibbling at you.

Don’t forget that your body is smarter than you. It doesn’t want to collect; it wants to release to keep you from doing damage to yourself. You don’t have to overdo it with exercising; you just need to make it a priority and a consistent part of your life’s routine.

Relaxation requires you to exercise to keep your internal garbage can from becoming a time bomb.

Key #3: Laughter

We don't laugh enough today. You can't laugh without relaxing. It is humanly impossible. It has been said for years, and it is still true today: Laughter is food for the soul.

Watch people today; look at their faces, gaze into their eyes and you'll see the tension that fills their life. The more their life is filled with "emotional stuff," the more uptight they become.

To relax, to unwind, to dump your inner garbage can, you have to laugh. One person looked at me when I made this statement and said, "If you had my life, you would see there is nothing to laugh about."

There is always humor in life. There is always something to smile about, to laugh about. Laughter is a way of exhaling all the stuffy air you have collected. Have you ever had a really good "belly" laugh? I mean one where you start and you can't stop. Sometimes the harder you try to stop, the more you laugh. And when it's over, you think "I needed that!" That's what I'm talking about. I'm talking about slowing down, taking the race out of life, looking around and finding the humor in your day-to-day life.

I am writing this while scooting across the sky on my way to Phoenix. The gentleman across the aisle had a frown on his face when he sat down and a look that said, "I'm not a happy camper." Well, this lady and her husband took their seat in front of and across the aisle from him. It was like God was challenging his frown. First, they couldn't decide who was going to take the window seat. Then, he put her bag in the overhead and she decided she needed something out of it. He took it down, she got what she needed and he put it back up. Five times he took it down and put it up. Each time asking her, "Do you have everything you need now?" Each time she would reply, "Yes!" Each time he had to take the bag down, he would also have to take her cane out. Each time he touched the cane, you could see him gripping it tighter and tighter in growing frustration.

I watched Mr. Frown as he watched this. At first, he just shook his head; then, he smiled a bit and finally, I could see the laughter that was happening inside him. He looked at me, shook his head and smiled that laughter smile. With that he leaned back in his seat, and I could see the difference in his presence—all because he found something to laugh about.

Laughter really is medicine for the soul!

Key #4: Attitude

How important do you think attitude is to your ability to relax? Do you find the calmer your attitude, the easier it is for you to relax?

Attitude is a very important part of relaxation. The more negative your attitude is, the tighter you wind yourself. The tighter you wind yourself, the more stress you are going to collect. The more stress you collect, the tighter you continue to wind yourself. Now, do you think there is any relaxation in that process?

Attitude is a choice. You can chose to see the good and enjoy the positive feelings that go with that, or you can chose to see the bad and deal with the negative feelings that go with that. It is your choice.

Attitude is simply a visual demonstration of what is going on inside you. Watch your attitude, and you will know your life.

When you are seeking the good, you will be much more relaxed. A bad day is a stressful day; a good day is a manageable day. You really do choose which one you get.

Relaxation is easier with the right attitude.

Key #5: Choices

Every event in your life has a pathway that goes with it. Every choice you make sends you down a path. If you chose the wrong path, the journey keeps you emotionally upside down. When you chose the right path, you get the joy of the journey.

The difference between the right and wrong path is all about the choice you make.

Take me seriously here. You can walk the right path simply by mastering one question. Before you make any decision, pause, take a deep breath and ask yourself this: Will this feed my confusion or strengthen my clarity?

If the answer is "confusion," it is the wrong path for you. To walk that path means you are collecting all the stress that comes with it.

When you choose the "clarity" path, you get the calmness that goes with that choice. On the "clarity" path, you can relax in knowing you're moving forward in your life.

Life really is that simple. That one question really will show you the right answer. The right path will help you relax and live your life to the fullest.

Isn't it time you worked on calming your life down and learning to relax and enjoy the gifts of your day?

Richard Flint, CSP, is Chairman and CEO of Flint Inc. He has had the opportunity to address people in talks and seminars throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Flint has studied, researched, written and spoken for 30 years in his field of expertise: human behavior and development. He has made appearances on more than 100 radio and TV shows, and he is the host of his highly acclaimed internet radio show, "Achieving a Positive Life." Flint is a breakout speaker at RFMA 2016.