

# Think Your Way to Self-Managing Your Sales Stress.

By Richard Israel

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There is a silent killer at work in America today. That killer is stress and it's eating away at the health and wealth of the sales workforce. Absenteeism as a result of stress-related illness costs sales organizations billions of dollars a year. It is critical both for your health, your continuing high performance at work and your organization in general to keep stress levels low. With awareness and proven skills, many of these problems can be both prevented and alleviated.

When under stress the majority of the body's energy suppliers are diverted to activate physical strength. Meanwhile, your upper thinking brain is deprived of the vital energy it needs for clarity of thought, and the decision making process. It is essential to tune into the warning signals your body gives you, to become aware of your own physical symptoms of stress. These signals tell you when you need to take action to relieve your stress.

Physical reactions to stress include increased heart rate and blood pressure. Hands and feet tend to become cold. You may sweat, breathing becomes faster, pupils dilate and the mouth becomes dry. Digestive problems are common symptoms of stress. Should you experience any of the above symptoms on a continuous basis, it is advisable to consult your doctor. Any attempt at developing new self-management stress strategies, be they thinking or behaving and responding in new ways may feel a little awkward at first. If it does not feel awkward and a little uncomfortable, then it is unlikely that your approach is radically different from previous ways of behaving. Push yourself to apply new and untried methods so that you can build up the number of choices of behavior that you have at hand. Put visual triggers near your desk (a Post-it-note or an uplifting poster) to remind you that you can manage stress in the future.

With self-awareness and a set of mental and behavioral models, you can make immediate and beneficial changes to the way to handle stressful situations. A greater understanding of stress enables you to have more control over your life. You will soon be able to consciously choose your responses and be the controller and not the victim of your emotions. Learning how to manage your thinking, support your emotions, take control of your physiology and become aware that you do have choices regarding a change.

The action plan that follows gives you the opportunity to use all the information you have stored in your long term memory, thereby tapping into your life experience. Take a situation that you have coming up in the future and plan how you would manage it using the 'PEP' (Problem, Emotion, Plan) strategy.

Step One: State the problem

1. Clearly define a stressful problem or situation:

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2. Consider the consequences of continuing to have this problem:

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3. Consider the benefits of solving this problem:

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4. Is there any part of you that wants to maintain the problem? Is so why?

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Step Two: Identify the emotion

1. What emotion are you experiencing with this problem?

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2. When you think of the problem, identify a specific activating event (e.g., if the problem stated in Step One is 'lack of self-confidence', note down a specific incident where you felt that you were lacking in confidence.)

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3. Belief/expectation/thoughts: Write down any thoughts that were in your head at the time of the specific activating event. What were you thinking about? Where you putting pressuring thoughts on yourself or on the others involved? (e.g., 'I should be able to manage this situation', 'I can't handle this', or 'others must do what I want them to do'):

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Emotional consequences: think of the emotions you experienced. Are there any secondary emotions involved? (e.g., feeling angry at being frightened):

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5. Disputing your thinking:

(a) Is your thinking logical? (e.g., 'is it logical that I should feel stupid in this situation?' or 'whilst it is preferable that others do what I want them to do, is it logical to think that they must?'):

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(b) Would everyone in this situation respond the same way? How might others react?

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(c) Is your thinking supporting you and helping you to achieve your goals? (e.g., you want to achieve your targets but think you can't):

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Step Three: Develop your plan

1. What are your goals?

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2. In an ideal world, what do you really want to happen? Define your positive outcome:

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3. How many different ways are there to reach this goal?

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4. Prioritize a strategy to reach your goal ('I shall.....'):

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5. In adopting this strategy how would you like to:

Behave:

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(b) Feel emotionally:

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(c) Feel physically:

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6. What mental visual images would be helpful?

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7. What thoughts would be helpful?

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8. What interpersonal skills would be helpful?

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9. What biological interventions - or lack of interventions - would be helpful (e.g., less caffeine, more deep breathing exercise)?

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10. Create a step-by-step Action Plan:

1st Step:

What?

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When?

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Why?

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2nd Step:

What?

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When?

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Why?

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You now have a greater understanding and awareness of how stress can turn you into a pressure cooker about to explode! However, you also have stress reducing technique to ensure that you remain confident and calm at all times. It's important that you gain an understanding of how you can manage stress and not let stress manage you.

Adapted from: R. Israel, H. Whitten & C. Shaffran, Your Mind at Work, (2000), pp119-125.

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