

*The following is an excerpt from*



**THE GIFT  
OF STRESS**

*How to Act on the Urgent Message  
That's Trying to Save Your Life*

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## INTRODUCTION

*F* *Feeling exhausted just thinking about the next conversation with your relatives?*

*Shaking your head at the thought of another day in a frustrating job?*

*Dreading having to take care of everything “on your plate”?*

We live in a fast-paced world. Our modern “do more” society, with its torrent of information, communication and instability has conspired against your plans for success and serenity. No wonder you feel stressed!

By now, you’ve tried some of the usual techniques to deal with stress—you’ve organized your schedule, treated yourself to massages, taken a vacation or indulged in a treat after a hard day.

These techniques work—to some degree. You feel better, get through your day, and reach another deadline. But then a new deadline looms, a new crisis arrives, and you’re once again on a roller coaster of good days and bad—an up and down, spinning, unending, stomach-churning ride.

Stress management and stress reduction techniques are limited because they don’t address the core issue of why you’re stressed in the first place. Their approach is to address your symptoms; this provides only short-term stress *relief*. As a result, your stress is going to return again and again, like a boomerang.

The path to a permanent *release* of stress isn’t cramming more into your day—taking on more responsibilities and obligations while setting aside a few moments of solace. Stress release takes aim at the *root* of your stress—hearing and acting on the message it’s trying to communicate, not the method of that communication.

That message is one of care and protection. Unfortunately stress can’t say any of this out loud. Instead it gets your attention by making you irritable, increasing heart rate, tensing muscles and contributing to 90% of visits to primary care physicians. It’s really hard to get our attention sometimes—even with the best of intentions.

The bad news is the louder, more forceful messages have taken a big toll on you and everyone around you.

The good news is you’re holding the solution in your hands.

*The Gift of Stress* has tools to finally act on the messages. You'll then benefit from powerful techniques to release the stress once and for all, and a clear course of action so you'll enjoy the increased health, happiness, meaning and satisfaction that stress has kept you from. That's something that time management, massages, vacations and treats can't do. They're just coping methods to help you stay alive. *The Gift of Stress* is designed to help you *live*.

People often ask me if I ever stress out. Like everyone else, I frequently experience stress. A major difference, though, is that I (and those who use this system) have learned to become acutely aware of stress, and to take immediate actions to release it. As a result, my stresses are generally blips that pass quickly instead of festering into larger issues that can lead to depression, grief, memory loss and physical illness.

“Be the change you wish to see.”  
– Ghandi

During a speech in New York City, the Dalai Lama said that when he gets bothered, he's really good at identifying what's behind it and bringing himself back to a calm state. As you read these worksheets take on a *stress release mindset*—where you are open to, and actively searching for, new perspectives and possibilities for letting go of your physical and emotional stress. I encourage you to adopt that mindset as you read this book and its potential as a new approach to dealing with your stress.

# THE SEVEN RS OF STRESS RELEASE WORKSHEETS

“*Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.*”  
– Maria Robinson

Going through this worksheet will do more than help you reduce or manage your stress. It will guide you through the process of looking more deeply at a stressful aspect of your life so you can transform its difficulties into opportunities. You’ll finally shift out of surviving mode and into thriving mode, get to the heart of why you feel stress, unwrap its tricky packaging and reveal the wonders waiting within.

You’ll release stress by recognizing your ideals, identifying clear steps to achieve them, and establishing reminders to keep you on track. Doing so will redirect the time and energy the stress had consumed towards activities and emotions in line with how you really want to live.

## **Instructions:**

Choose a stressful situation that you definitely want to release (you can use the life stress scale on page 63 and the Key Values Assessment on page 146 of the book for assistance). The more you enjoy not stressing out about this situation the more you get out of applying the Seven Rs of Stress Release.

Start by writing in your chosen situation at the top of the attached worksheet and continue from the left column (R 1). Use the suggestions and starter questions below to fill in the chart and uncover the details of your stressful situation (there are many more guiding and probing questions throughout Part 2 of the book).

Use short thoughts, without censorship, to describe the situation as if it were occurring right now. Feel free to add other specifics of the situation in the boxes below.

Keep a piece of paper or journal next to you while going through the steps. When first going through the worksheet, or when releasing a particularly big stress, you may get flooded by thoughts or feelings. If this happens, write them down until you have a clear enough head to continue.

\* Please note: page numbers shown here refer to pages in the book.

**R 1: Recognize your ideals, values, and goals — 10 minutes**

Before any direct stresses can be released, you have to know what you want your situation to look and feel like. Pick an area of your life and envision your ideal in as much detail as possible.

Use this step to push the boundaries of your desires, goals, lifestyle, etc.

**Suggestions to make this step as productive as possible:**

- ☞ Use a blank canvas as a starting point (page 69).
- ☞ Use specific, descriptive terms (page 72).
- ☞ Envision your ideal through using multiple senses (page 74).
- ☞ Keep expanding your ideal until it makes you go, "Wow!" (page 70).

**Some questions to help you get started:**

- ☞ Where does the situation take place?
- ☞ What am I feeling when I am in the situation?
- ☞ Who else (if anyone) is with me?
- ☞ What can I hear, taste or smell?
- ☞ How am I behaving in this perfect situation?
- ☞ What obligations and responsibilities do I have?
- ☞ How do I feel at the height of the situation?

**R 2: Review your current situation — 10 minutes**

In order to make changes, achieve your ideals, and release stress, you have to know where things stand. For this step, describe the facts of what your stressful situation is like right now.

**Suggestions:**

- ☞ Tell it like it is.
- ☞ Don't try to solve your problems in this step.
- ☞ Clarify the facts instead of opinion.
- ☞ Describe rather than negate.
- ☞ Focus on your responsibilities in the situation rather than those of others.

**Questions to guide you:**

- ☞ Who is doing what to me?
- ☞ What am I doing to them?

- ☞ What word to describe what I'm feeling?
- ☞ What, if anything, would I rather be doing?
- ☞ Where in my body does the stress show up?
- ☞ What do I say or do when I feel stressed?
- ☞ What wants and fears are coming up?
- ☞ What do I get out of being in this situation?

### **R 3: Reveal what in your current situation is in alignment with your ideals and what isn't — 10 minutes**

By comparing your current situation with your ideal version of it “what’s working” and “what isn’t” become apparent. Compare what you’ve written for R 1 and R 2. Each current situation should have a corresponding ideal.

*Fun fact: At least one ideal must be met in your current situation to have kept you in it.*

Ask yourself:

- ☞ For what am I grateful?
- ☞ Which personal values and priorities are being challenged or honored?

### **R 4: Release ideals that are holding you back — 15 minutes**

Each of your ideals served a very important purpose at some point in your life, but the necessity of some of them may not carry over into the present. Once you are aware of the ideals that are no longer benefiting you, it is to your advantage to let them go. Keeping them only makes your life more difficult and constricted.

Suggestions to make this step as productive as possible:

- ☞ Change the questions you ask yourself (page 97)
- ☞ Make the most of the four stress diffusers: size of gap, attachment, familiarity, and mood (page 46)
- ☞ Utilize the Power of Yet (page 71)
- ☞ Challenge limiting beliefs and entitlements (page 93)

Some questions to help you get started:

- ☞ What do I get as a result of this ideal? Is it important at this stage in my life?
- ☞ What limiting beliefs and entitlements do I hold?

- ☞ Why is it easy for me to enjoy how things are right now?
- ☞ What makes it easy to release my unhelpful ideal?
- ☞ What's hindering me from releasing it?
- ☞ What do I notice about myself when thinking about letting it go? Is there a shift in mood, attitude, physical reaction?
- ☞ Who do I know that could easily handle this situation? Why could they handle it? How am I similar?
- ☞ Which ideals do I feel better about? Which feel the same? Worse?

## **R 5: Raise the likelihood that your future situation will match your current ideals** — 20 minutes

Some unmet ideals serve as driving forces in your life. They inspire you to improve yourself, your community, and your environment. In these cases, you need to make plans that will get you where you would like to be.

Reacting with stress isn't productive, because it keeps you from productive things you want to do when you're not stressing out.

**Suggestions to make this step as productive as possible:**

- ☞ Use the S.M.A.R.T. goal method to frame your next steps (page 115)
- ☞ Start with the goal that's most exciting.
- ☞ Adjust the Challenge or your Ability (page 39)

**Some questions to help you get started:**

- ☞ What about the predictable event (or activity) triggers the stress?
- ☞ What obstacles stand in the way of reaching my ideal (communication skills, personal boundaries, self-confidence, etc.)? What can I do about them?
- ☞ How do I want to react in this situation?
- ☞ What have I done in the past to achieve similar goals?
- ☞ How can I move forward while keeping my ideals satisfied (as is, or with alternatives)?

**Pick one aspect of the stressful situation that you'd like to improve.**

- ☞ What's the easiest thing you could do to make a difference?
- ☞ What's the biggest thing you could do to make a difference?
- ☞ What's the silliest thing you could do to make a difference?



**R 6: Remind yourself of what you have to do to achieve your goals — 5 minutes**

Congratulations on going through a very personal and thorough self-evaluation. Aside from enjoying a life of lowered stress, you deserve to recognize and reward yourself for taking the time and putting in the effort to undo years of harm. It's easy to skip this step, but giving yourself a reminder of what you've learned will help you maintain the progress you've made. Plus, a reminder makes the process more enjoyable, which is what gifts are all about.

Pick a reminder that so that this experience stands out and remains memorable.

Suggestions to make this step as productive as possible:

- ☞ Use an external cue that engages at least one of the senses—uplifting songs, pleasing scents, unique physical objects (find lots of examples in *Making Your Reminder* on page 122).

Some questions to help you along:

- ☞ What will be your reminder?
- ☞ What would you like to be thinking?
- ☞ Where will you put the reminder?
- ☞ How soon can you get the reminder?

**R 7: Repeat the steps as necessary**

Releasing stress is an ongoing process that gets easier the more it is applied. With each application of the Seven Rs deeper layers of stress will be revealed and released.

Some questions to help you:

- ☞ What would best serve you the next time you encounter stress?
- ☞ What would make your reaction to the next stressful situation different and better?
- ☞ What positive aspects to the current situation hadn't you seen before?
- ☞ Do you see this situation—both the ideal and current—in a new way? How?

**Final takeaway: *Stress is optional!***

