

The ABC's for Eliminating Stress From Your Life

By Cole Baker

Stress is all around us. We wake up with our minds full of yesterday's things still left undone plus today's work load yet to be accomplished. There are often some small morning problems to handle at home and then it's out the door to fight through the morning rush hour traffic to get to work. The day begins with a new "crisis" or two to handle plus eleven "urgent" emails waiting for immediate attention. And so it goes, a full day with constant interruptions, some unpleasant surprises and not nearly enough time and support to handle it all. Finally you're back in traffic "fighting" your way back home again. Whew! What ever happened to the simple 40-hour week?

Almost every week the newspapers or magazines report about how bad stress is for our physical health, personal happiness and interpersonal relationships. Try satisfying customers and coworkers, let alone your family, when you feel so overloaded and stressed. Yet, the mark of a true professional is "one who can stay calm and rational during a crisis".

Fortunately, there is a way to greatly reduce the ravages of stress that is relatively easy to implement. It can be so effective that for many people the stress of traffic and travel is no longer experienced as stressful. In fact, handling traffic stress may just become a metaphor for handling all of life's seemingly frustrating situations where we feel "blocked" in our "wants" with no practical way out.

The answer is as simple as ABC.

A is the event – just what happened

B is what I tell myself (in my head) about the event

C is my immediate emotion and behavior

This idea, first formalized by the famous psychiatrist Dr. Albert Ellis, simply implies that the moment you change what you say to yourself about what happened, you change your emotional response and hence your resulting behavior. The change in your emotions will impact both your choices of words or actions, as well as your tone of voice and facial expression. Even the loudness and timing of your words may change. All of which will change peoples' response to you. Thus, what you tell yourself can significantly reduce your stress, while improving your relationships.

There are three issues about this we should stay aware of as follows:

- 1- We can't change the past, not even theoretically. We can lie about it, we can deny it, we can be angry about it **but we still can't change it!** Remember, what we think is "now" is already the past.
- 2- Everything in our life is exactly the way it is supposed to be, because that's the way it is and stress is just the mental process of resisting what is.
- 3- Fritz Pearls, the founder of Gestalt Therapy, said, "...awareness of the process of life alone is curative". This includes staying aware of the "big picture" at all times i.e. **you can't change the past.**



What is necessary to create an inner calm during the crisis of the moment is to tell yourself factor B statements such as:

<u>Situation</u>	<u>Statement to Yourself</u>
You are at overload feeling stressed and can't get it all done today.	Instead of "I'll never be able to finish this today" say, "I'll do what I can do, best I can, I'll leave the rest alone". You'll get calm and actually do more.
Someone let you down and did something "wrong".	Instead of "How could they be so stupid" say "start where you are, do what you can".
You are very upset and must attend a meeting with the one you are upset about.	Instead of "I can't stand this guy. He's a jerk". say, "If I were not upset, how would I handle this". This will aid you in seeing things in perspective.
Somebody just said or did something that I don't like and I am instantly furious.	Instead of "Joe makes me so angry! I hate him!". say, "Isn't interesting how I upset myself when Joe does that".

These are just a few of the ways to get or stay calm and rational during a crisis.

In the example of getting stressed in traffic or travel, we could use the factor B mental approach to remove the anxiety. Most of us have experienced anxiously trying to return a rental car to an airport and, in our haste, passing the rental car return exit. We now have to go all the way around again causing even further delays.

What we could have done on the way to the airport is used a helpful factor B statement such as, "There are only two possibilities, either I'll make the plane or I won't". This would have calmed us so that we would have been less stressed and thus more mindful, probably not missing the rental exit. If you use this process to be more mindful when feeling anxious you will soon have an automatic "big picture" mental awareness and be on your way to a more stress free life.

An old Cherokee spoke to his grandson about two wolves that were fighting inside of himself.

One wolf is EVIL: Anger, Fear, Sadness, Anxiety, Resentment and Regret.
Second wolf is GOOD: Joy, Love, Happiness, Empathy and Compassion.

The grandson asked, "Grandfather, which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "**The one I feed**"!

A positive factor B self-talk feeds the GOOD wolf.