

NETWORKING & ANXIETY REDUCTION

ANXIETY CAN INTERFERE WITH YOUR JOB SEARCH

The thought of interacting with strangers in networking, informational interviewing, and interviewing-- when the stakes are high—can lead to stressful foreboding.

Whether you are

- making a cold call,
 - meeting a recruiter at a career fair or at a company information session,
 - leaving a voice-mail message,
 - writing an important email,
 - attending a reception of corporate executives,
 - or beginning an interview,
- anxiety can prevent a successful conclusion.

Anxiety is the result of

- **Self-consciousness:** Everyone can see my new blemish or my shaking hands or my sweat, and they are laughing at me!
- A **sense of inferiority, incompetence, and self-doubt:** My boss, or my co-workers, or I think I am stupid and incapable of doing the job.
- **Perfectionism:** If I make mistakes, I will be a failure. Since I know I will make errors, how can I even begin? If I do begin, how will I finish because I will never know when I enough is enough?
- **Blaming:** Other people are usually at fault for mistakes. The responsibility for error never is my own. I do not understand why I never really feel I have control over my life.
- **Procrastination:** I never get anything done!
- **People-pleasing:** The only time I ever feel good about myself is when someone else needs me or compliments me on a job well done.
- **Self-criticism and negativity:** I am pitiful; I am hopeless: I will never be able to succeed!

Ask yourself:

- Do you recognize yourself in these descriptions?
- Do you repeat words of worry over and over in an endless, self-tortured spiral?
- Do you bite your nails or crack your knuckles?
- Do you postpone important tasks or avoid them altogether?
- Do you toss and turn all night before a big event?
- Do you annoy your family and friends with constant mindless, meaningless chatter?

Do you answer, “yes,” to any of these questions? In truth, most of us do at one time or another.

Then ask yourself, “how can I manage these destructive feelings and behaviors? How can I turn my stress and nervousness into useful energy?”

RESPONSES TO ANXIETY

You can handle anxiety! Choose a method of stress reduction, sensible to you, to get in control of what you **think, feel, and do**. Then practice over and over until you feel successful.

Understanding, practice and repeated efforts are the keys.

Our reactions to modern-day stresses have evolved from the natural instincts that once protected primitive man from the saber-tooth tiger and allowed the human race to flourish: **“fight, flight, or freeze!”**

In the same defensive way, modern anxiety

- keeps our body, mind, and emotions aroused and ready for uncertainty and danger
- and encourages us to rehearse solutions to potential problems.

Contemporary **“dangers”** include threats to our dignity and sense of self-worth, and so we often feel the need to “fight, fly, or freeze” in a job-search environment.

In general, when anxiety strikes, we tend to fixate on the problem only. We become rigid and do not respond to our innate capacity to generate creative solutions.

Unfortunately, over time we can establish and develop **counter-productive behaviors** that become **patterns and habits** and actually prevent us from working out problems.

SO HOW CAN YOU LEARN TO RELAX IN STRESSFUL MOMENTS?

In general, understand that stress reduction is a combination of relaxing your mind and relaxing your body.

Consider the energy of the brain, manifested in waves:

Beta is a state of aroused mental activity, the alert working state of cognition and concentration.

Alpha is a state of calm, relaxation, reflection, and creativity during, for example, the moments just before you fall asleep.

Theta is a free-flowing state of visual thinking, enhanced learning, healing, and suggestibility, occurring, for example, in the moments just after you awaken.

Delta is REM sleep, a state of intense meditation and a slow, deep, deep sleep, the dream-state in which large muscles are paralyzed so the sleeper cannot act out the stories in dreams.

The Process of Anxiety Reduction

1. The first step is to “relax” your brain by deliberately helping your consciousness to go into the **alpha** state;
2. the second step is to help your body move into a quiet state;
3. the third step is to breathe deeply and regularly;
4. and the fourth step is to say the calming and strengthening words which will help you succeed.

Body and Mind Relaxation

This strategy is one suggestion for you to try and then to practice over and over until you know the true feeling of relaxation, calm, and control that you will need in difficult situations.

1. **Identify your physical manifestations of stress.** Many times you are unaware of these symptoms until you are miserable and in trouble, so you must train yourself to recognize them at their onset:
 - Headache
 - Nervous stomach
 - Neck, shoulder or back aches or stooped posture
 - Clenched hands or teeth and cracked knuckles
 - Pouring sweat
 - Dry mouth, sore throat, or timid voice.
2. **Next, immediately match the physical symptoms of tension to the situation, person, or ideas provoking this reaction.** Become aware of any **repetitive patterns** between physical symptoms and responses: “I see my boss, and I get a headache.”
3. **Find a quiet place with no noise or play soothing music with no words.** You want to turn off your “left-brain” and allow your “right-brain” to be dominant.
4. **Lie quietly in a place that will be comfortable but that will not induce sleep.**
5. **Use the technique of full-body relaxation: tense-and-release.**
6. **Repeat soothing, calming, constructive, and self-affirming words to support your positive efforts.**
7. **Now, ideally, you can return to the distressing situation, person, or idea, relaxed, prepared, and energized to address the problem in a self-controlled, yet creative manner.**

If you do not have the luxury of time, privacy, and/or space, at the first sign of physical distress or, ideally, when the situation, person, or idea appears, use the quick method of **“The Third Eye,”** combining brain and body relaxation:

- **Look up at white space on the wall or close your eyes and look to the middle of your forehead:** the crossing of your eyes produces the calming alpha brain wave.
- **Intentionally relax the specific, troublesome area of stress on your body.** Remember how your body felt at the end of your full-body-relaxation exercise and bring your body to that state.
- **Then, take five deep breaths in from your nose, down through your belly, and out through your mouth. Hold each breath for the time you could say, “Mississippi.”**
- **Remind yourself of the positive statements you have developed to help you through this situation.**

Now, you are ready to face the confronting difficulty with assurance and strength.

WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM RESULTS?

With practice, you will begin to approach what once were scary or anxiety-provoking situations or people with competence and confidence. You will be able to deal directly with the content of the problem creatively and constructively instead of “fighting, flying, or freezing!”