

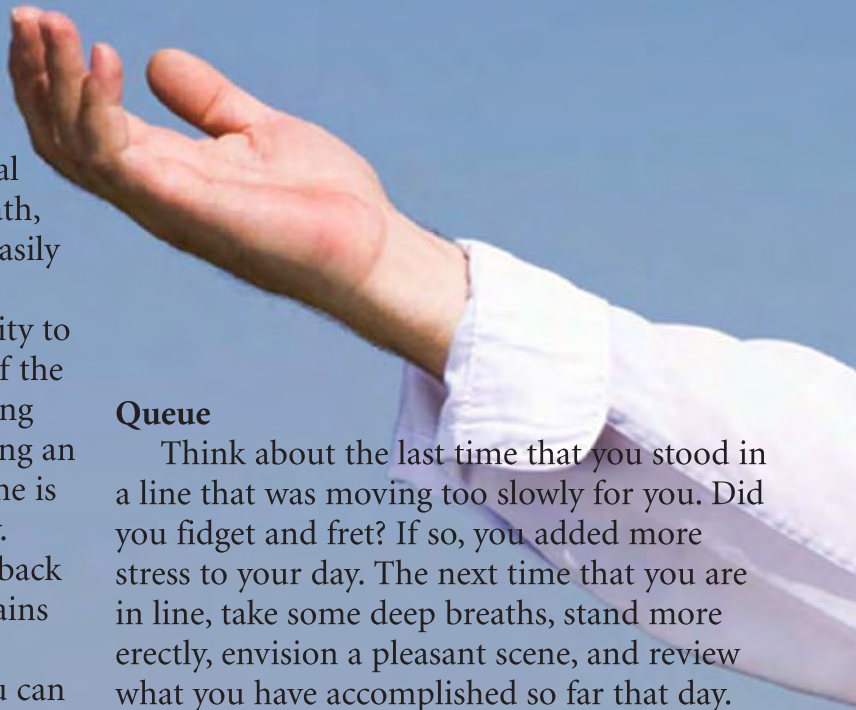
Reducing Stress through Breathing

By Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

An increasing body of evidence indicates that panic disorders, in part, are respiration disorders. In other words, the onset of panic is often due to improper breathing. Doctors observe that panic stricken patients frequently undertake chest breathing, which requires the use of more muscles and energy to draw shallower breaths than diaphragmatic breathing. The typical adult uses diaphragmatic muscles to breath, which yields a deeper, less taxing, more easily achievable breath.

Breathing is fundamental to your ability to function optimally. Phil Jackson, coach of the Chicago Bulls, notes that when he is feeling anxious or out of control, especially during an intense moment in a game, it is because he is shortchanging his breathing in some way. When he focuses on his breath, and gets back to a normal rhythm, he more readily regains control.

If you can control your breathing, you can actually control the beat of your heart, and most other symptoms of stress that you experience. There are plenty of times throughout the day when you can stop and get a second, third, or even fourth wind. Unfortunately, all too often, your internal motor is revving a little too high and you miss the opportunity. Here are some other opportune places to pause, perhaps where you least expect there to be a pause.



Queue

Think about the last time that you stood in a line that was moving too slowly for you. Did you fidget and fret? If so, you added more stress to your day. The next time that you are in line, take some deep breaths, stand more erectly, envision a pleasant scene, and review what you have accomplished so far that day.

Public speaking

I know a fellow speaker who, when about to deliver the keynote presentation to a group of a thousand people or more, will take a couple of seconds before beginning to take in the total surroundings.

Even if you are only speaking to a small group at work, the opportunity is there. Naomi Rhode, a successful entrepreneur and



talented platform speaker, refers to the "privilege of the platform," as the honor of being able to be speak to others and to have them listen willingly. If you've never considered this a special time where you could have a strategic pause, hereafter, you have dozens of opportunities awaiting you in the forthcoming year.

Passenger

When you are being transported by others, you have the wonderful opportunity to pause and reflect. Use the opportunity of being in motion, but not having to steer the vehicle to your best advantage. The longer the ride, the longer that you get to pause.

Dinner

Rather than wolf down your food, stop and reflect how great it is that you are about to eat. Think about how the food is going to taste before you actually taste it. Many people recite a prayer for the "bounty about which we are to receive," and if that works for you, splendid.

Athletic contests

Have you ever noticed that the best foul shooters in basketball take an extra couple of seconds before releasing their shot? The best hitters in baseball stare into the field, get firmly set, and then look at pitches. In all sports, there is an advantage in taking a strategic pause at opportune moments to maintain a higher level of personal control.

Chewed out

This may seem like the least likely time that you care to pause, but if you do so, you are in a better position to defuse inflammatory situations. When a boss, co-worker, or spouse is incensed and you are the object of their wrath, by pausing, you are able to gain insights that you might not otherwise gain if you simply jump into the fray. Much of the anger that other people direct at you is self-correcting, i.e., later they will apologize for overstepping their boundaries or for having blown their stack. Moreover, your most appropriate response is not likely to come if you respond in anger. Recalling the observation of Dr. Hans Selye: When you're under stress, you will make the wrong decision.

When you are under verbal attack, it is likely you will say something that you will regret. When you pause and rather matter-of-factly reflect on the situation, you have a much better chance of responding in a way that is helpful to both parties.

There is a compelling scene in the movie, *Crimson Tide*, wherein Gene Hackman's character smacks Denzel Washington on the jaw twice in succession. Washington would be justified in striking back. Instead, he puts his hand to his own jaw and looks back at his attacker with an almost curious detachment. Washington is pausing and reflecting on an issue of importance to humankind. There are three minutes left before the decision to launch the missile has to be made. The men are awaiting crucial information that will affect the decision. Washington's ability to reflect on the potential for global thermonuclear war greatly outweighed his momentary pain and discomfort of being struck. By pausing, he was able to grasp the big picture without letting the immediate moment affect him.

Take the time to pause and decrease your stress. Deep breaths in, deep breaths out.

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Jeff Davidson, "The Work-Life Balance Expert®," has written 56 mainstream books, and is an electrifying professional speaker, making 774 presentations since 1985 to clients such as Kaiser Permanente, IBM, American Express, Lufthansa, Swissotel, America Online, Re/Max, USAA, Worthington Steel, and the World Bank. His *60 Second Series* with Adams Media, including the *60-Second Organizer*, *60-Second Self-Starter*, and *60-Second Innovator*, are popular titles in China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Poland, Spain, France, and Brazil.

Jeff has been widely quoted in the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Times*, and *USA Today*. Cited by *Sharing Ideas* magazine as a "Consummate Speaker," Jeff believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of work-life balance, and he supports that quest through his Web sites www.BreathingSpace.com and www.Work-LifeBalance.net and through 24 iPhone apps at www.itunes.com/BreathingSpaceInstitute.