



THINK OR SINK THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

By Gina Mollicone-Long ©2010

There's no such thing as stress! I love starting conversations during the holidays with this comment because most people are usually at their "wit's end" and this statement brings their frenzy to a sudden halt. They stare at me with bewildered looks trying to ascertain my sanity. It gets them every time.

Stress not an actual "thing." You can't put it in a wheelbarrow. Think about it for a moment. You can certainly put boxes, bows, ribbons and even the turkey in a wheelbarrow. But you can't put your stress in a wheelbarrow. So, what is it? Stress is actually a *decision* to classify something as *stressful*. Stress is a reaction. In many cases, stress is an overreaction to the circumstances. But the reaction is not universal. Some people consider flying in an airplane to be one of the most stressful things they can experience, whereas others fall asleep as soon as the plane pulls away from the gate. Same experience; completely different reactions. The difference lies in perception.

I'm not saying that the effects of stress aren't real. They are very real. In fact, stress gets the blame for most of our health problems today. Stress is a big problem for many people. However, the solution is easier than you think. Change the way you think and you will immediately change your stress level. You are actually in control of what you classify as stressful and what you do not. Realizing this fact and putting it into action puts you back in control of experience. You are no longer at the mercy of external circumstances. You can deliberately choose how you respond to any situation and therefore you can always be in control of the level of stress in your life.

Your immediate reaction to any situation happens instantaneously and automatically, usually without thinking. In situations that you classify as stressful, this response is called your fight-or-flight response. The fight-or-flight response is designed for emergencies, for dangerous situations that threaten our survival. It's not really meant for freaking out over things like unwanted holiday guests, too many parties or the wrong holiday gift. The problem with always operating in this fight-or-flight mode is that our bodies are constantly producing biochemicals such as adrenaline and cortisol which have been shown to have detrimental effects on our health when sustained for long periods of time.

Holiday situations are not inherently stressful. The stress cycle begins at the moment you decide to classify a person or a circumstance as stressful. Furthermore, once you are in stress mode then other situations will seem more stressful leading to a snowballing stress effect. The only solution is to break the stress cycle.



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TIPS FOR BREAKING THE STRES CYCLE

1. **LOOK UP AND SMILE.** Neurologically, we usually access our negative emotions by looking down so looking up can have the reverse effect by pulling us out of these negative emotions. Numerous studies have shown that smiling makes us feel good because it releases endorphins and serotonin – two powerful biochemicals that help us feel good.
2. **BELLY BREATHE FOR ONE MINUTE.** We tend to be a shallow chest-breathing culture but slow, deep, diaphragmatic (“belly”) breathing has been shown to decrease anxiety and tension. Breathing this way for one-minute halts a stress response. Doing it for ten minutes reverses the response.
3. **REFRAME.** Think of an entirely different meaning for your situation. Make it up. There are thousands of interpretations for your situation. If you change the meaning then you’ll immediately alter your response.
4. **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU WANT.** There is a part of our brain called the Reticular Activating System (RAS). Our RAS is in charge of finding what we are looking for. When things go wrong, we tend to focus on what’s going wrong. Due to the function of our RAS, this only leads to finding more of what’s wrong. If you look for what’s right then your RAS will automatically find it and then you’ll start feeling better.
5. **TAKE ACTION.** Don’t just wallow in your problem. Do something positive that will help you feel better. This could include getting a breath of fresh air, listening to uplifting music or getting some exercise.

In the end, it all comes down to a choice. The choice you have is to choose your response to any situation. When you alter your response to any situation then you alter its effect on your life. Either you make the powerful choice for yourself or another choice gets made for you based on habit or the input of the people and circumstances around you. Overcome your stress by reading **THINK OR SINK**, available everywhere. There’s a whole chapter dedicated to 42 Things will positively change your outlook.



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Gina Mollicone-Long helps people get what they want. She is an international best-selling author, compelling speaker and peak performance specialist with a mission to reveal greatness in individuals, teams and organizations. She is the co-founder and CEO of The Greatness Group, a multi-national corporate team building and training company. Since 1998, she has trained, coached or spoken to tens of thousands of people globally. Her books, *Think or Sink* and *The Secret of Successful Failing* are widely read and enjoyed by people around the world. She can show you exactly how to get out of your own way.

