Lesson A

Everything You’ve Always Needed to Know About Stress - But Didn’t Know to Ask
A personal note from your Coach, JoAnna Brandi

Welcome back. This is one of my favorite topics - that of Managing Energy. If there is one skill in life you can learn that can really be considered a "Master Skill" it's the skill of managing your own energy. More important than managing time (which you really can't manage anyway) managing energy - by understanding where you get it from and where you leak it - will help you to fit more of the things that are most important to you (what you value) into your day.

Stop right now and think about how you spent your time over the last 24 hours. Were there activities, situations or occurrences that sapped the energy right out of you? I'll bet there were. Were there activities, situations or occurrences that enriched your day, made you feel good and left you with more energy than you began with? I hope so.

Now weigh your energy 'drains' against your energy 'gains.' At the end of the day had you gained more energy than had been drained from you? Or, was it the other way around? Did you go home with plenty of energy to enjoy the evening, the kids, your hobbies or loved one? Or did you go home too tired to enjoy much of anything?

Clearly, working in today's crazy business environment can be stressful. The down economy has forced staff cuts and put too much work on everyone's plate. Unless you have the skills to deal with the stress, it's a recipe for disaster. Allowing energy to be drained from you all day long will make your workdays difficult and your personal life less than fulfilling.

The human system wasn't designed for extended and prolonged stress. We're perfectly designed for dealing with a clear and present or momentary danger, but we're not designed to live under constant pressure. In addition, human beings are the only animals that experience stress by simply imagining stressful situations. That says a lot about our 'brain power!' So just as we used our minds to create vision and imagine an exquisite customer experience in previous issues, we will learn how to use its power in this issue to break the habit of responding to stress negatively. Remember, perception IS reality.

We start this topic with a discussion of ... stress! After you read this issue I'm sure you will have a different attitude about stress and a new resolve to reduce the stress levels in your life. This whole topic will give you the insight and power to make your life healthier, happier and oh, yes, more productive.

By the way, I'm so happy you're on board here with us! Many of those who have used this program tell us that it is facilitating positive, measurable changes in their lives. Remember, this is a self-paced and a self-determined program through which you will be as successful as you choose to be. If you read it regularly, highlight the portions that are of special interest, review it frequently, and teach others what you have learned, you will integrate the learning
right into the fabric of your life. The results will come easily and predictably over time.

If you read the lessons haphazardly, don't go back to review or share the information, it's likely that your success will be limited. As always, the choice is yours. As you read on in this issue, you will see how every critical choice becomes in the management of your health and your stress. Right now, make the choice to clear your mind, clear your desk (or get away from it) and get ready to seize the power you have to master the stress in your life. Understanding how the stress response works in the body is the very first step in controlling it.

So here we go! Enjoy!

JoAnna
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How would you like to: Feel better about yourself and more in charge of your life? Increase your energy? Experience a sense of balance and fulfillment more often? Spend less time 'putting out fires' and feeling 'under the gun,' and more time taking care of your true priorities?

- Quiet self-defeating mind chatter?
- Learn the skinny on stress, attitude and change?
- Empower yourself to make choices that better you as a person - and therefore benefit everyone around you?
- Guide your team and/organization in being the best it can be?

Given the millions of dollars people spend on self-improvement and stress management, the answer to all those questions is probably a resounding, "Are you kidding? Of course I want those skills!"

That's why we'll devote four issues to the topic of "Managing Your Energy," another stepping stone on your path towards mastery in the Art and Science of Exquisite Customer Care™. As you commit yourself to making choices that support the practices you're about to learn, you're bound to set a number of life-enhancing changes into motion.

It's like the ripple effect when you've thrown a pebble into a pond - one small change can set waves of better ways of being into motion, and those waves move in ever-widening rings covering a vast expanse hundreds of times bigger than you would ever think possible. Conscious choice after conscious choice, pebble after pebble yields continuous growth, continuous improvement and customer care excellence.

Choosing when and where to toss your pebbles - how to manage your energy in each moment - is more powerful than time management (you really can't manage time anyway), and is at the heart of all successful personal, professional and organizational improvement efforts. It's a combination of your ability to know how to respond to unexpected and difficult situations in ways that don't deplete you, to be proactive instead of reactive, and to act in accordance with your internal values that will help
you reach and stay at the top of your game. Great leaders know how to manage their own energy and become stewards of organizational energy.

A lot of what *we've* learned about energy management *we've* learned the hard way - through the school of 'hard knocks.' It's our hope that we can spare you a few of those knocks and guide you in learning ways that will empower you by showing you both the *importance* of taking care of yourself, and the absolute *necessity* of doing so. After all, you can't take care of customers if you don't know how to take care of yourself, *first*, right? It only makes sense.

**Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, You Are the Fairest One of All**

"It's all about me, me, me," reads a saying on a key chain sold through one of our favorite catalogs. Guess what? When it comes to energy management, it really *is* all about you! More specifically, it's about your relationship with yourself - the all-important *inner relationship* in our Working Relationship Tripod™.

And we have some great news: Many of the ways you're going to learn to bolster this key relationship will mirror what you've learned with us so far about Exquisite Customer Care.

For example:

If you're taking care of your very personal and very human needs (Remember Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs) and you're doing your personal 'basics brilliantly,' you'll find yourself better positioned to achieve both personal and professional success.

If you communicate well with yourself (i.e., you have positive and focused self-talk) you're more likely to have a more optimistic outlook and a calmer, more proactive approach to challenging situations.

If you know your own personal values and consistently make choices that are in alignment with them, you'll reach your goals more often and *without* negative mind chatter.

When you make positive changes and positive choices on a regular basis, the odds of accomplishing what you set out to do are in your favor. When you make these types of choices consistently, you're actually developing *repeatable systems* for yourself that will enable you to thrive anywhere, both professionally and personally. *Repeatable systems* is a fancy turn of phrase that means 'your personal or professional recipe for success.' It's not much different than following the recipe for a favorite meal or dessert; over time you might tweak it or experiment with it so that it tastes exactly right to you and the people you prepare it for - then you stick with it, creating a palate-pleasing dish every time.

The key to creating a recipe or repeatable system is to *find out what works and stick with it - then repeat the process or pattern in other similar situations*. So when we
don't have instructions or a recipe per se in front of us, we have to identify the steps of repeatable systems by looking very consciously at how we succeeded in the past.

For instance, I used to frequently host dinner parties on the Full Moon. There was a core group of friends that attended these parties on the beach near my home. The success and ease with which I was able to pull them together had to do with our clear understanding regarding the steps involved.

After a point in time, I sent my invitations out with a note that *basically said*, "You know the drill." That's shorthand for "You know my repeatable system." My guests knew they had to tell me whether or not they were coming, if they were bringing guests, and what kind of food they would bring to cook at the shared cooking facility that used to be available to us. The final step in making this monthly soiree a success was for me to arrive at the beach at least an hour early to have everything set up before the guests arrive. The result? A well-planned, consciously crafted positive ripple effect yields a great time for everyone who attends the party!

*Clear steps + repetition = repeatable systems.* And as repeatable systems (including the ones you are creating through your studies with us) are refined, they yield success. On the other hand, when you don't have repeatable systems in place to support your professional and personal objectives, it's simply harder to reach them and takes so much more energy to do so. After all, who among us hasn't experienced a negative 'ripple effect'?

For example, if you don't have a repeatable method or system in place for filing paperwork, your desk may be overloaded with the stuff. If your desk is buried beneath paper, you may find yourself distracted with the background thought, "I've got to clean this desk...I've got to clean this desk..." as well as missing important deadlines or information that get lost or misplaced in the clutter.

When you're distracted by the clutter you're wasting valuable mental energy that you would be better off using for other endeavors. If you're missing deadlines the consequences in terms of all your stakeholder relationships will probably be compromised. See how that works? Meanwhile, people we know who are successful at keeping their desks organized typically practice repeatable systems like taking a half hour at the end of every workday to clear their desks (and their minds) and to make a list of what they have to do the next day.

In today’s world of information overload, one best have a strategy and a system to deal with the distraction. Distraction squanders our energy and can even lower our IQ’s!

The bottom line: Every choice we make has a consequence (or ripple) that brings us closer to or away from our goals. That's why it's so important for you to identify, follow and occasionally update the repeatable systems that will help you create the outcomes you desire in every aspect of your life - whether it's customer loyalty, weight loss, or planning your weekends in such a way that everyone in your home both gets things done and enjoys themselves. That's why it's so important for you to
choose exactly when, where and how you should toss your pebbles - in other words, to consciously choose when, where and how you expend your energy.

Whether you find yourself riding positive or negative ripples right now, we're going to give you plenty of tips for managing your energy that will help you create your own personalized, repeatable systems for staying on top. But before you can do that you've got to look at those things that typically disempower us all from time to time.

Just as it would be tough to fill a glass that's full of holes, it would be pretty difficult to set up effective energy management systems without first addressing and patching up your 'energy drains' so that you can contain and work with your energy most effectively. And a great place to begin exploring energy drains is to look at the primary sapper of our life force and joy: stress.

**Stress Is Here to Stay: Why You Must Learn to Live with It**

What comes to mind when you think about or say the word stress? Do you think of all the things on your 'To Do' list? Your daily challenges? Tough relationships? And what adjectives would you use to describe the word stress? Would you use negative words or positive? Words like tension and anxiety, or words like gift, thrust and fuel?

If you're like most people, you have a large, negative connotation attached to this very small word. That's why we're utterly delighted to let you know that there is both 'good' and 'bad' stress. No kidding! We're going to learn about good stress in a few moments. But first we're going to look at the physiological origins of stress, which are rooted in the body's natural response to the perception of danger, and how this primal function can go awry in today's modern world.

Way back in the time of our ancestors, say the cave people, the wiring of our brains and bodies included what we call 'the stress response' for survival. It was a useful life-saving function that is still handy today in cases of real danger. For example, who hasn't heard stories about a mom literally lifting a car off the ground to release her child who was pinned beneath it? Or how about people who survive accidents or natural disasters due to a sudden onset of strength and/or speed? Ever wonder how on earth they did it?

Here's how it happens: When you perceive danger, your brain sends a signal that floods your body with stimulants like adrenaline, aka epinephrine and cortisol compounds. The primitive or “reptilian” brain takes over and signals the blood to rush to the large skeletal muscles around your arms and legs (in case you have to put up a fight or run away). Meanwhile, with all your energy redirected for and focused on “fight or flight”, other normal functions such as digestion, assimilation of nutrients, the fighting of infections and other internal processes temporarily shut down. That's a good thing if you're being chased or attacked.

In fact, this automatic response to danger - whether real or perceived - was mighty helpful when our lives were threatened by very real danger like wild beasts each and
every day. It was an essential tool for the survival of our species; those with a very weak response became dinner for the beasts, those with the strongest fight or flight response ate the beast for dinner. And so we evolved.

Fast-forward thousands of years: The daily need to fight for our lives, in a physical sense, has diminished quite a bit. But our bodies, so well programmed for survival in the wild, now react to almost any perceived negative occurrence - yes, even an upset customer or missing the budget deadline - by producing the same fight or flight response complete with physiological and chemical changes. This can be damaging to the body, the mind and the emotions. So while this Stimulus ==> Reaction sequence is very helpful at times, it is very hurtful at others.

That's why Hans Selye, the Austrian endocrinologist who in 1926 studied "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand" and labeled it 'stress,' would later refer to stress as the "rate of wear and tear on the body." And that makes complete sense, because as you perceive a stressor (whether real or imagined) and react physiologically with the flight or fight syndrome, your immune system is compromised. Your body starts pumping out adrenaline (which, by the way, is an addictive drug). If you don't burn that adrenaline off by exerting yourself physically it becomes destructive.

Adrenaline is useful (ask any runner, speaker or actor), but in massive or too frequently repeated doses it becomes toxic and affects normal bodily functions inappropriately. This, quite simply, wears out your organs. As your organs are worn out faster than they should be, your body ages faster.

Think about it: Stress literally ages you. OUCH! And anger, one of the emotions frequently linked to stress, lowers the immune system for a whole eight hours after your anger has passed. No wonder many of us have a tendency to catch colds and other infectious disease after we've been 'stressed out' for an extended period of time!

To complicate matters, when the stress response is triggered the mind begins to look for additional danger (like more beasts). It looks for things that are 'wrong' (Red alert: Remember, what you focus on grows...) and filters out what's going well. Why? Our lives used to depend on us finding the beasts before they found us. Get the picture? If you are a police officer, fire fighter or game show contestant and require a quick reaction time, this is still a pretty handy reflex. But it's safe to say the rest of us need it far less frequently.

It's been estimated that more than 90% of all illness in the U.S. is somehow related either directly or indirectly with stress. In the short term, mishandled stress has been known to raise the blood pressure, heart rate and blood sugar while decreasing digestion processes. In the long-term, it can worsen the short-term effects so that they become chronic problems such as high blood pressure, coronary heart disease and diabetes.

Stress has also been linked with water retention, a reduced inflammation response, exhaustion and medical problems such as headaches, depression, fatigue/reduced attention/diminished memory, stomach problems, rashes, mental health problems,
back pain, violence/child abuse/suicide, burnout (a blend of depression, anxiety, dissatisfaction, lack of motivation and negative perceptions) and more. Double and triple OUCH!

None of us want any such health challenges, nor do we want to age before our time, right? So let's begin to look at and manage our stress differently starting right now!

**Introducing the Dr. Jekyll (or 'Good Side') of Stress: Meet Eustress**

Up until now the picture we've painted of stress may appear somewhat dismal - especially if you're particularly stressed out these days. Hang in there, because this is where you're going to learn about the importance of stress in today's world and how it can have a positive role in your life!

Believe it or not, without some measure of stress or 'tension,' we'd probably be very bored and get very little done. Think about the energy it takes to play a game of tennis, speak in public, solve a problem that really intrigues you, enjoy a favorite hobby, swim or dance. Consider the energy you need to handle customer calls with enthusiasm, to motivate your team to keep up the great work they're doing, or to create a theme to celebrate your company's 25th anniversary.

That kind of energy is a type of stress, too. But it's a positive stress technically known as *eustress*, as opposed to the negative stress you just learned about (which we should more accurately refer to as *distress*). Eustress leaves you feeling invigorated and actually enhances your quality of life. It's *creative stress*, as opposed to destructive distress.

Here's what we mean: Close your eyes if you wish, and think about the last successful project you completed. It may have been a party you planned, the addition of a deck on to the back of your home, or the successful completion of college hunting and applications that resulted in your son or daughter enrolling at a wonderful university. How do any of these projects begin? Usually with a picture of a new reality in your mind's eye.

You might have envisioned guests at your party having a great time as they listened to jazz and enjoyed the scintillating taste and smell of the jambalaya you made using your great aunt's recipe. So before you even sent out invitations you could 'see' them, milling about in your freshly cleaned home, you could 'hear' their happy voices against the background of Miles Davis or Thelonious Monk. In your imagination you could actually 'feel' the satisfaction and contentment that hosting this party for people you love and appreciate would bring you.

The same mental process and emotional pull would go in to building that deck where you wanted to enjoy the warm sun and fun-filled barbecues, or in your vision of your child accepting a college diploma on a beautiful May day. You knew where you were and you knew where you wanted to go - the new reality you wanted to create. So what pulled you towards your vision? What galvanized you into action? You guessed
it - creative tension. That's how good stress plays an important part in our lives. They say that, "The only difference between a diamond and a lump of coal is a diamond had a little more pressure on it." What a great way to look at it!

Energy capacity diminishes with underuse as well as overuse, so we need to balance both kinds of stress in our lives intermittently with some kinds of renewal activities. If we want to live full out, we have to learn to notice where our attention and energy is going now, and where we need to have it go instead so we can create the lives we want.

As this concept begins to sink in, it will become clearer that how you handle stress is a choice, plain and simple. In fact, there are probably hundreds of situations you experience every single day as distress that you can transform into eustress. Hundreds of moments in which you can switch gears from a destructive to a constructive mode. As we've said before, it's all about perception, and perception is reality.

So let's say that right now you hear the sound of your boss's footsteps in the hall. The sound is a stimulus that will set off a reaction. That knee-jerk reaction comes from our experiences in the past. Stimulus ===>Reaction. Will it be distress as your thoughts race all over the place, wondering how you will explain why you've missed your budget deadline or will you make another choice?

We have small window of opportunity (scientists say about a quarter of a second) where we can short cut the stress reaction, realize it's not a real danger, and create a new response, one that is more deliberate and in line with the goals we have today. In that case: Stimulus ===>Response-ability.

With a little practice you can consciously choose to view it as an opportunity, perhaps one to calmly talk with him or her and ask for advice on how to facilitate the budget process.

Now consider the angry customer, who may very naturally trigger a response that screams "Warning! Fight or flight time!" How can you turn your perception inside out so that you truly respond to the customer as if he or she is presenting you with a "gift," or information about a gap in your service that you can use to make your service better - and your business more profitable? You'll be learning skills to help you do just that - to shortcut the stimulus-response reaction - over the next few issues.

As early stress researcher Selye said, "It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it." The way we see it, the beauty of mastering your reaction is three-fold: This skill will assist you in taking care of your health, enhance your overall quality of life and, as you become more and more adept at it you'll be able to successfully coach those around you to do the same! So perhaps it's time to update your inner dictionary when it comes to this loaded word, stress. Maybe it should read something like:

Stress is a primal mind/body response that presents us with an energy management choice between good stress (excitement, anticipation, creativity, constructive action) and bad stress (fear, body tension, destruction and illness.). The critical difference is how we choose to perceive the situation.
Mindsets for Managing Stress & Gaining Energy

A dear friend once said, "Empowerment is an inside job." We couldn't agree more. If you truly value your health and yourself, if you want to do things differently to reduce your energy drains (distress) and boost your energy gains (eustress), it's up to you to find the best ways to rewire your response to stress. As we like to say around here, the object is to SACK your stress and shortcut the stimulus response circuit:

Stop in the moment you feel your adrenaline kick in.

Assess what's happening, and whether or not you are truly in danger. (What story are you telling yourself about it?) (Is it true?)

Choose the best and healthiest course of action to positively shift your feelings into alignment with your goals. The more clearly articulated, the more vivid, more real your goal is the easier it will be to stay on course.

Kindly take that action! Kindness is important – too many people shame themselves into a new course of action – it’s not a great strategy, shame moves us far down the emotional scale.

It’s far nicer to be pulled by a bright and compelling vision than to be prodded and punished by the toughest part of you.

You may already have a sense of what types of shifts and changes will work best for you. For some people, a physical bodily change makes all the difference (i.e., taking deep breaths, stretching, going outdoors for fresh air, exercising). A brisk walk about the building greeting others with a smile might be your shift of choice.

For some people the key to empowerment is their mental processes, which are directly linked to the words they choose to think and say (i.e., positive empowering words like "I can" and "I will" as opposed to negative disempowering ones like "I can't" and "I wouldn't" will increase energy).

Drawing on emotions or feelings can also be used as a tool to boost energy and reduce energy leaks. For example, if you sit for a moment and think about people or things you appreciate, you'll find that it's pretty hard to stay stressed or angry. In fact, gratitude has been shown to raise our “happiness setpoint” as well as reduce the stress response.

Perhaps you’d like to combine all three and try the approach used at the Institute for Heartmath in California. They taught me – and tens of thousands worldwide to do a short exercise called the Freeze Frame® which I’ve included as a gift at the end of the lesson. Hang it up where you work and refer to it every time you are feeling that stress level rise. After a while the practice of moving the energy from your head to your heart will begin to open up a new pathway of information.

For most of us, it's very effective to shift approaches from time to time so that we keep opening new pathways in the brain (which is what literally happens when we do
things differently!). Most people get bored doing things only one way and need a little variety in life. So we suggest having several tools to draw from.

For some, the quickest route to deflating distress is to form a mental picture that helps them to physically or emotionally disengage from a distressing situation by taking them 'outside' of what's happening. So you might imagine that the situation is a movie that you're watching from a distance in the projectionist's booth. This gives you a chance to make a shift from distress to neutrality, enabling you to ask yourself objective questions like, "Hmmm... What's going on here? They must be misunderstanding my intent. I'll try a different/better way to communicate..."

These varied approaches or tactics work hand in hand with several stress-transforming mindsets/strategies. Consider the best blend of shifts and mindsets for you and begin applying them over the course of next week. In other words, keep filling your customer care toolbox so that you're prepared anywhere, anytime, to handle any situation!

- **Reality Check.** Ask yourself: Am I really in danger, or is this simply FEAR (a.k.a. False Expectation Appearing Real)? The distinction is important, because perception is reality. Sometimes the upfront acknowledgment that in reality, you are safe and sound, is enough to make the shift from distress to eustress and handle a situation confidently.

- **Live Your Personal Values.** Countless professional and self-improvement gurus tout the ideas that: "You are your diary. You are your calendar." In other words, what you truly value is what you live, so you are the sum of your choices. (In Issue #14, you explored your personal values in depth.) Then ask yourself, "Do my thoughts, words and actions reflect my values? Does the way I conduct myself from moment to moment show what my values are?" If you're not living in accordance with your values, chances are you're experiencing a lot of negative mind chatter and 'inner negotiation' as different parts of your brain duke it out to be heard and acted upon. In other words, chances are that you're adding to your own negative stress level.

  What steps could you take to cut the dark self-talk and free up that space and energy for self-pep talks? How could you transform this destructive approach into a constructive one?

  How could you better organize your schedule so that your values are attended to before all else? As Stephen R. Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* puts it, "The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

- **Anchor yourself and alter your perceived reality.** There are so many wonderful ways to step out of stress, fear and anger and into the reality of who you are and what you're about. Some of these ideas may sound simple on the surface, but we've found that if we consistently put them into practice they make a dramatic, positive difference in our lives.
For example, people may think it sounds trite to 'count your blessings' or to pause for a moment to think about people and things you genuinely appreciate. But scientists have proven that such thoughts and actions actually change patterns in the brain and the heart. A calming 'time out' can lower one's blood pressure and heart rate, and can even trigger the brain to produce endorphins, those 'happy hormones' we produce during exercise!

An 'attitude of gratitude' is a powerful force for good! Take time to think of all the things you are grateful for and just watch your situation change!

Stay on TRACK\textsuperscript{sm} Act with Trust, Respect, Appreciation, clear Communications and Kindness - toward others and especially \textit{yourself}!

We recommend that you also frequently review your USP* (Uniquely Special Personality - from Issue #4) and remind yourself of your many growing strengths, skills and talents. When dealing with others, the \textit{only} assumption you should ever make is that people are doing the very best they can with the information they have at and up to that moment in their lives. Finally, take every opportunity to keep learning new skills and affirming what you already know. We remind ourselves daily that we're getting better and smarter every single day!

- \textbf{Surround Yourself with Support}. It can be tempting to keep to yourself when you're stressed - especially if you're an independent type like me - but our resident wellness expert Gael Chiarella, executive director of The Yokibics® Institute for Personal Development and author of the Yokibics® Mindbody Fitness Workbook, reminds us of recent research showing that connecting with others can actually help us overcome our stress.

According to the study, which was conducted at the University of California, when women exhibit 'tend and befriend' behaviors (such as taking care of children or talking with friends their bodies actually produce oxytocin, a hormone associated with labor and lactation. This 'happy hormone' (a.k.a. 'the cuddle chemical' and 'the hormone of love'), flushes stress hormones out of the body. So there's a physiological reason why many women tend to want to talk with friends or loved ones at the end of the day!

Meanwhile, men tend to isolate themselves with extra hours of work or TV watching at the end of a rough day. They produce oxytocin, but it's often overrun by testosterone. That's why they often \textit{don't} want to talk when they get home from work. Our verdict? Whether you're a man or a woman, take the people who care about you up on their offers of support. Whether it's a trusted friend or friends, a family member, a sports team, or a support group, stay connected and let them be 'the wind beneath your wings' when you're feeling low, flat or stretched too thin.

- \textbf{Practice Patience}. There's no way any one of us can completely avoid mistakes, hurts, boredom, confusion and other challenges as we get better at
the things that are important to us. Stick with it, have faith in those old sayings about 'learning from our mistakes,' and trust that even moments where you feel like nothing important or exciting is happening in your life, there's something happening that you can use as fodder for professional and personal growth. It might help to remember that Edison found over 1,000 different ways not to make a light bulb before he created one that worked. Post-it Notes® began with a glue that didn't stick. We can't even begin to count the many different ways we've learned not to write an article, give a speech or bake a Souffle. And please remember that even Babe Ruth struck out at bat more than he succeeded.

You Really Are the Sum of Your Choices

"Relationship is everything, and everything is relationship," said Buckminster Fuller. Without question, that includes your relationship with yourself. When it comes to handling stress, your choices either empower or disempower you. You can bring yourself either closer to or away from your goals and values. Each choice you make is either/or. Ain't no in between.

Now you may more clearly understand why we believe that you work for you, no matter what organization you work in. Nothing affects you more than your choices. So how do you want to grow by design or by default? Do you want hold on to the competing forces within yourself, or act in alignment with your values and vision and conscientiously choose to thrive?

Do you want to let life happen to you, or do you want to establish repeatable systems that support your highest good - and therefore the highest good of all those around you? Do you want to proceed to live your life consciously and create what you want, or do you want to wait and see what happens to you - and let someone else make all the choices?

The fact that you're here is a good indication that you are daring enough to care deeply enough not only about your customers and your team, but yourself as well. It tells us that you're willing to patch up those 'holes' through which you're losing energy, and to find new avenues to energy gains. Tune in next week as we explore two powerful vehicles for keeping your energy on the rise: attitude and optimism!
Lesson A Skill Builders

One exercise to give you a clear view of exactly what depletes your energy (stresses you out), and what replenishes your well.

Identify Energy Drains & Gains

Before creating repeatable systems that will assist you in managing your energy wisely, it helps to have a clear picture of where your energy gains and drains are. Here's a simple, practical way to do just that:

- Draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper. Label the left column 'Energy Gains' and the right column 'Energy Drains.' (Or use the Bonus Worksheet at the end of this lesson.)

- With the last 48 hours of your life in mind, list the things that drained your energy, and the things that gave you energy in the appropriate columns. Then review them and assign each gain and drain a point value between one and five. A one in an energy drain means it adds a little enjoyment and gives you a little energy boost, a five is something you're absolutely wild about that thrills you and takes your breath away. A one in an energy drain means the stressor or situation depletes you a bit, a five indicates that it's something extremely energy sapping.

- You probably guessed the next step - add the total points for each the energy gains and the drains. Does one outweigh the other? Are your energy expenditures productive or non-productive? If your energy gains are much higher than the drains, good for you! Stick to what gives you pleasure, but certainly pay attention to the drains as well to see where you can plug those holes up.

- If your drains score higher, there are many practical, logical steps you can take to bring them down over time. For example, are the drains related to your environment at home or work? Are they related to psychosocial issues? Physiological factors like diet, caffeine or medication? You can hit some serious pay dirt by figuring out which of your drains are real and which are perceived, which will give you a good idea of which ones you have some control over and which ones might be out of your control.

- Based on your analyses, complete the following phrases:
  - Patterns I've noticed include ____________________
o I realize I’ve been investing my energy in
  (worry/anxiety/stress)_____________________

o Things I can do something about immediately are____________________

o Things I need help, advice or support with are____________________

o I commit to making the following energy efficient choices either mentally,
  emotionally and/or physically to reduce the amount of energy drains/stress
  in my life:____________

o My values include ________________, and I choose to invest in my
  energy in them by ______________________

It may be worthwhile to reread and update this exercise, which may become a part
of your repeatable systems for professional excellence, at least weekly and keep
track of how you’re doing.