Sharon Melnick, Ph.D.

EXCERPT FROM uco ress

Powerful Tools for Staying Calm, Confident, and Productive When the Pressure's On

EXCERPT FROM

Success Under Stress

Powerful Tools for Staying Calm,
Confident, and Productive
When the Pressure's On

SHARON MELNICK, PhD

AMACOM

New York • Atlanta • Brussels • Chicago • Mexico City San Francisco • Shanghai • Tokyo • Washington, D.C.

More Advance Praise for Success Under Stress

"Keep this book handy! Sharon Melnick's tools and techniques really work. Our colleagues saw a truly positive change in their resilience to workplace stressors. Her 'able-to-use-NOW-in-the-stressful-moment' techniques dissipate crowded thoughts, bulging project lists, and hyper-adrenalized physiology. They are powerful and immediately effective."

—Anne Camille Talley Retired Senior Director of Global Market Research Professional Development for a major pharmaceutical company

"From the advice in this book, I no longer feel overwhelmed by the growing list of things to do, nor the personalities, politics, or inevitable problems. I now approach situations with a level head and open mind, and come out ahead. No one else knows the secret to why I am successful; they just know that I am a better leader and communicator. I am more satisfied in my contribution and ultimately happier in my life. Read this book! Dr. Melnick is in your corner giving you the tools, power, and confidence to become a better and more effective version of you."

—Elizabeth Lee Director of Marketing, Pitney Bowes

"Dr. Melnick has a unique gift of raising your perspective on what the true stumbling blocks to success really are, then "lifts you out of the fog" to reach your goals and objectives. In my years of exposure to many in the field of business development coaching, there is no one that stands out from the rest, and is more qualified than Sharon Melnick. Her book, *Success Under Stress*, will awaken the 'Sleeping Giant' within."

—Bruce Libman President and CEO, Total Network Consulting

"Don't get mad, get results! Sharon Melnick provides practical, holistic tools to help you avoid distracting 'noise' and enables you to convert obstacles to opportunities. Read this book to achieve, and be valued!"

—J. Scott Berniker a Sales & Market Development Vice President

"Sharon's stress-busting secrets have helped me launch to the next level in my career while creating an amazing home-life balance as well. Read what she says in this book, it will change your life."

> —Stacy Francis President of Francis Financial, Inc., and Founder, Savvy Ladies

"Sharon Melnick's presentations at our Working Mother national conferences have been among the highest-rated by our audience of women leaders, and diversity and work-life professionals, and her book is an absolute must-read. *Success Under Stress* contains truly fresh solutions for the challenges of working parents everywhere."

—Janet Wigfield Executive Director of Conferences+Events, Working Mother Media

"We face an epidemic of overwhelmed Superwomen—causing hormone chaos, weight gain, and sleeplessness. With this book, at last Dr. Melnick delivers us a prescription for powerful choices that create balance amidst high-achievement and hyperbusy days."

—Sara Gottfried, M.D. Integrative Physician, author of *The Hormone Cure*: Reclaim Balance, Sleep, Vitality, and Sex Drive with The Gottfried Protocol "As a mother of two and an expat working in Beijing, stress had been part of my day for years. That is, until we learned Dr. Melnick's tools for *Success Under Stress*. They were extremely relevant and useful to better our daily life and career satisfaction. I recommend that women leaders or aspiring leaders learn the skills in this book, especially the ideas of "Be Impeccable for your 50%"; how to influence others, and the breathing techniques."

—Fang Hu Chemical Engineer, Procter and Gamble

"The tools in this book are invigorating and inspiring—a truly fresh look at common challenges."

—Nora Cashion

Director at a Fortune 100 Company

"In this age of rapid, unrelenting change, resilience is a core competency for sustaining productivity and projecting leadership presence. *Success Under Stress* provides turnkey strategies and cutting-edge techniques for being resilient regardless of external challenges. It is a must-read for men and women in business today."

—Kelley Black Managing Director, Balancing the Executive Life

"Success Under Stress is the handbook for anyone who aspires to a full life, which, by definition, will be busy and often stressful! Sharon's easy, and quick-to-implement techniques, combined with her explanations of the physiology underpinning our emotional reactions, have been revelatory for me. Managers, new graduates, business owners, and all those experiencing a professional challenge will find quiet power in the pages of this book. I only wish I'd been able to read it a decade ago!"

—Rebecca Jackson Startup Advisor/Consultant "I accomplish so much more now than I ever used to, with far more confidence and significantly less stress. The wealth of information contained in this book also helped me blow past my stuck-in-themud sense of powerlessness about not taking a career step to achieve my dreams. If you're feeling stressed-out, overwhelmed, not achieving your goals, or just wish you could be more confident in your life at home or at work, BUY THIS BOOK – IT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE!"

—Marti Boylan artist

"In today's pressure cooker world there is no better book than Success Under Stress for women entrepreneurs. Every woman CEO should buy it! Keep it at your desk. Use it daily, like I do!"

—Eli Davidson Award-winning author, small business CEO mentor

"Without focus or direction, time and the opportunities it brings can easily get frittered away. Before we know it, we're exhausted or frustrated because we haven't achieved our goals and we're now a year older! *Success Under Stress* is a timely and much needed resource for busy adults who are constantly battling too many demands for their time. Sharon Melnick does a great job of helping us achieve clarity and the ability to practice the wisdom of serenity."

—Helen Whelan CEO, Success Television



xi



	Introduction: What This Book Will Do for You	XV
SECTION I Constant Stress: Reclaiming the Power to Succeed	SECTION I	
1	From Survival Under Stress to Success Under Stress	5
2	Controlling What You Can Control: The 50% Rule	19
	SECTION II	
	Taming the Stress of Too Much to Do and Too Many Obstacles	
3	Changing Obstacles to Opportunities	33
4	Get the Calm and Focus of a Yoga Class in 3 Minutes	
	(or Less) During Busy Work Days	51
5	Strategies to Reduce Overload When Everything Is a Priority	74

Acknowledgments

About the Author

SECTION II	I
------------	---

Solutions for Self-Imposed Stress: How to Care Less About What Other People Think

	Less About What Other People Think	
6	The Fastest Way to Build Confidence	113
7	Quick Fixes to Eliminate Anxiety	132
8	Techniques for Turning Self-Criticism into Self-Confidence	141
	SECTION IV	
	Rx for Relationship Stress	
9	How to Stay Rational When Someone Is Driving You Nuts	161
10	Shift Instantly from Anger to a Cool Head	182
11	How to Get Other People to Stop Stressing You Out	189
	an amy a v	
	SECTION V	
	Create Success Under Stress All Around You	
12	A New Perspective on Balancing Your Work and Life	211
13	Call to Action: Getting Others to Own Their 50%	218
Арр	pendix The Top 12 Resilience Strategies for Success	
	Under Stress	221
Enc	lnotes	223
Index		233

249

2

Controlling What You Can Control: The 50% Rule

"There's only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self"

-ALDOUS HUXLEY

Stress is not necessarily the result of the workload, the lack of response, the interruptions, or the "traffic jam" of unfinished projects and overextended commitments. It occurs when the demands of a situation exceed your perceived ability to control them. The key is that the more you perceive you can control, the lower your stress, and vice versa.

Stress is not external. It's internal. It's not the 100th email of the morning in your inbox per se. You feel overwhelmed because you process that event as, "Mayday, Mayday! I am overloaded." If that email announces a delay in the approval for your project or gives you negative feedback about your proposal, you experience stress from your visceral reaction of worry about your future reputation, job security, and income. If that email is littered with mistakes from your assistant, stress comes from the anger you experience over your inability to control his actions.

As suggested in Chapter 1, we don't generally choose these reactions. Many are hardwired in our brains. And on a moment-to-moment basis, our brains coordinate an elaborate and delicate sym-

phony of responses that will determine our neurochemistry and, consequently, how we feel and what we are prone to think. Without knowing it, once these internal patterns are established, we lock into them. (No worries! You'll learn how to "unlock" in Chapter 4.)

Since stress is experienced internally, changing it is within your control. How to begin? By changing your response.

You can flip an internal "control switch" to take you out of survival mode and into success mode in any situation. All it requires is some proactive effort to steer your responses away from the automatic, involuntary, and reactive toward the deliberate and purposeful.

When you control a situation, you influence the outcome. Each and every time you exercise control—for example, by changing a thought, slowing your breath, choosing your words carefully, or blocking time on your schedule—you determine what happens in your brain, your body, and the situation itself. In a confident and calm state, you work faster, solve problems more easily, and make fewer mistakes. You react more positively to others and can motivate them to help you get desired results.

Any single action can begin to put you on the Success Under Stress cycle. Every time you take control of something you actually can control, you reinforce the other affirmative acts, which keeps you on the positive spiral. Like a butterfly flapping its wings and eventually changing the world, you can create immediate and dramatic shifts in your effectiveness and stress level by exerting control in small situations throughout the day.

Of course, you've been around the block. You may already know you're supposed to "control only what you can control." But are you aware of all that's actually within your control? Are you accessing your control switch consistently—especially in the heat of the moment?

Control What You Can Control

Every challenge can be divided into two categories—the 50% of factors we can control and the 50% we can't (see Figure 2.1). Factors we

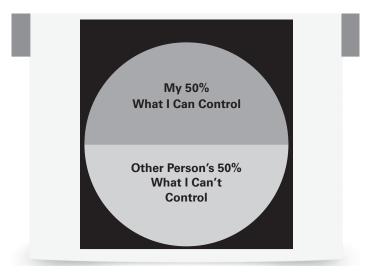


Figure 2.1

can't control include macrolevel forces, such as market trends, technology developments, senior leadership decisions, reorganizations, traffic jams, other people's illnesses, and foreign country bankruptcies. Additionally, there are a myriad of microlevel forces we can't control, such as someone else's tone of voice or what they write in an email.

Things that are out of your control attract your attention like a magnet attracts metal. However, by focusing on factors outside of your control, you're setting yourself up for stress. You're back on the treadmill, merely surviving.

Let's begin by dividing the situation into what's within your control and what's beyond it. Think of a current situation that's stressful for you. In the circle in Figure 2.2, list what's within your control, and what isn't.

Next, focus your internal lens on the matters that are within your control.

When caught in the grips of a stressful moment, remember to focus on what's in your control. To help you do that, I've developed

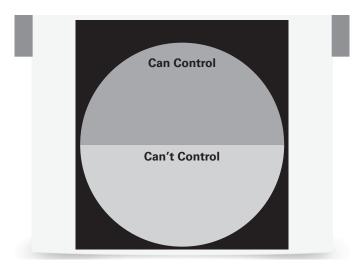


Figure 2.2

a Golden Rule of Resilience that thousands of corporate managers and business owners have used to lift themselves into Success Under Stress in any interaction.

I call it the 50% rule.

Be Impeccable for Your 50%

Being impeccable means controlling only what you can control and taking 100% responsibility for it. By following this rule, you ensure that your contribution is effective before allowing any waste of time, energy, or attention on "the other 50%" that isn't within your control. The 50% rule puts you in charge.

Being impeccable for your 50% motivates you to be proactive. Don't wait for conditions or other people to change. Instead, take charge of the part you can play. Changing your own emotional and physical state allows you to be "part of the solution rather than part of the problem." To illustrate, here are three examples "ripped from the headlines" of my life over the last week.

First, a new client, Vikki is a VP in a large healthcare organization. Her manager is a "screamer," who often would lash out at Vikki.

Stressful! Not in her control! In response, Vikki would become overly talkative to defend the actions for which she was being reprimanded. She began to dread those meetings and felt frazzled for hours after she left them.

Vikki learned to be impeccable for her 50%: She used the breathing technique you will learn in Chapter 10 to stay cool, calm, and collected in the face of her manager's outbursts. She prepared and rehearsed her talking points ahead of the meeting so she could refer to them concisely in the heat of the moment—and she gave thought to aligning her proposals with her boss's specific motivations (as you will learn in Chapter 11). She managed to keep in mind that her boss was unable to handle her own emotions and that the "screaming" had nothing to do with Vikki's competence. Now when she met with her boss she was confident and effective. Within a few weeks, Vikki persuaded her boss to follow her recommendations for a large-scale reorganization. In fact, she was ultimately put in charge of the merged divisions! In short, she didn't try to change her boss; she changed her own perspective, physiology, and approach to the problem. That's the 50% rule at work!

Second, earlier this week I emailed someone at a company who'd hired me to conduct a training session for its high potentials. I needed a response by the end of the week, but it didn't arrive. Have you ever been in that frustrating situation? I wanted to scream or barge into the person's office and demand a response!

So, what did I do instead? I challenged my initial reaction of blaming the nonresponder. I didn't know what happened on the other end to cause the delay, but I gave the person the benefit of the doubt. That immediately began to dampen my frustration. I used a breathing technique you will learn in Chapter 4 to help me problem solve so I could think through other options. I got out of the tunnel vision that made me think the email recipient was the only person who could help me resolve the issue. Surely someone else in the organization could provide me with the relevant information.

I also considered whether I had done something to delay the response. I scanned the email to see if I had used effective influencing strategies and if there was anything I could have communicated better. Was I clear regarding the required response? Was my message compelling? And did I align it with the company's interests so management would be motivated to respond promptly?

With all of these active self-management efforts, my attention was diverted into positive action. I had a game plan that made me feel in control. I was steady and able to think clearly for my next client appointment. (Then of course, just to be impeccable for my 50%, I immediately reached out to people who'd contacted me but to whom I hadn't yet replied!)

Third, after conducting a webinar for Women in Cable and Telecommunications, I got a call from Danielle, an attendee. When I asked her how she had applied the tools she learned in the webinar, she said that the night of the training she had a little tiff with her husband and, of course, was tempted to go to sleep angry with him. We laughed as she told me how she remembered the 50% rule *after* she was sarcastic to her husband: "You know, I could have talked to him differently. It really wasn't all him." Once Danielle realized that, she apologized for how she had handled it and gave her feedback respectfully. In return, he offered a mutually agreeable solution to the conflict. They both went to work the next day feeling connected, absent the friction that otherwise would have set them off on the wrong foot.

When you focus on your 50%, you start from the premise that there is always something you can do to shift the situation - even if it doesn't feel that way initially. Keep in mind that there are three categories of stress shifters. No matter what the situation, you can always:

- Change your perspective
- Change your physiology, and
- Do something to change the problem

Even the mere *perception* of control reduces the stimulation of a stress response and will break the Survival Under Stress cycle. This

shift in your emotional and physical state will motivate you to want to deal with situations rather than endure them unhappily or avoid them. Literally even a simple, one-minute visualization about how you could bring value to the situation will flood you with positive emotions and alleviate fear. After working with more than 6,000 individuals, I have yet to be told about a "stuck" or stressful situation in which we couldn't identify a handful of things the person could do within seconds, minutes, or days to radically reduce the stress, feel more in control, and create a better outcome.

At this juncture, I should be clear that I'm not encouraging you to control everything you can just for the sake of doing so. Being impeccable means **not** trying to control what is going on "across the line" in other people's 50%. Nor am I advising you to be a control freak who bulldozes over people to get your way. The approach I'm suggesting is meant to be used in the service of a positive intention and help you be less stressed and more effective as you progress toward a worthy goal. The idea is for you to have awareness of your own approaches and other people's styles in order to remove friction and resistance, and get to a solution quicker. Just think of a time that you felt productive and on a roll. You probably had a sense that you were "in control," right?

Q: What if I am impeccable for my 50%, but others aren't for theirs?

A: That's a legitimate question! In fact, I sent my dearest friend an early version of this chapter and the next day she texted me about her school age son and daughter, Mae and Kyle: "My kids were arguing all morning. At a quiet moment I pulled my daughter aside and told her to try the 50% concept in the book. She replied, 'That's a book Kyle should read!'"

I know each of you has a "Kyle" in your life: "I do really good work, but my boss doesn't support me." "I give referrals to other people, but they don't refer back." Here's my response to help you stay on track

with this approach: First, being impeccable for your 50% doesn't mean you should give other people a free pass on bad behavior. You want to be impeccable for your 50% because it helps you. It's the only route for keeping stress in check and creating successful outcomes. Being impeccable for your 50% is like the proverbial scenario on the playground in which the other child hits you first, but the teacher only sees your reaction. Your actions alone are all that matter in determining both your reputation and the results you get in your life. When your track record is reviewed, all that will matter is what you did.

Second, part of what you will learn in this book is how to sort through what's within your control and what isn't when it comes to other people. No doubt, you can cite colorful examples of people who don't deliver on time, who exhibit negative attitudes, who are unsupportive, unreliable, indecisive—or worse. You wish you had the remote control button to make them act differently to support your own (or your business's or family's) goals. You want to remember that people are driven by their own biology and psychological background. Through their actions, they reveal their capacity (or lack thereof) to give you what you need.

Following the 50% rule approach brings great clarity to difficult relationships. As a general rule, start by doing everything you can within your own control to improve the situation. Try to make your efforts effective (more on this in Sections III and IV). People often try ineffective strategies for a long time and then conclude that nothing can change. If, after you have been impeccable for your 50%, no change has occurred in the environment or the relationship, you may then conclude that the other person or the situation is currently incapable of change. This gives you information that will help you choose either to continue or to seek another situation. Often, our continued efforts once we pass this point are what make a situation or relationship chronically stressful. That's self-imposed stress!

In most (though not all) situations, truth prevails. A person who is not being impeccable for his 50% faces consequences at some point.

From a spiritual point of view, you might not know the larger scheme of things. Maybe that person will get his due down the line. Maybe he's already suffered hardship you don't know about. But that's not for you to control or worry about. Your task is to be effective under the given conditions or to change yourself or your conditions.

Q: What are the benefits of being impeccable?

A: It may seem like a lot of work, but once you get the hang of it, it will usually take no more than a few seconds or minutes to be impeccable for your 50% in any situation. With a little practice, this approach will become second nature and effortless. You don't have to be "perfect"; you just have to try your best to be intentional.

And the benefits far outweigh the efforts. In each instance where you are impeccable for your 50%, you instantaneously reduce your stress level and get on the path toward the result you want. This approach gives you a lot of power. It builds others' trust in you because it builds your credibility. By the time you've been in an organization or a business network for a while, people know your reputation: whether you're true to your word; whether you deliver on your promises; whether you give or only take, and so on. If you're generally impeccable for your 50 percent, people know to trust your perspective when conflicts arise.

Further, a longstanding body of research shows that people who attribute their successes and failures to their own behaviors and actions are more likely to take proactive steps, while people who believe that external forces such as luck or fate determine their life may lose hope in the face of a stressful situation.²

The ability to put yourself into optimal mental and physical states and to bounce back when you get derailed gives you the power to make your best contribution every day. Your colleagues and managers will notice. Your clients and networking partners will notice. Each time you choose (and have the skills) not to react negatively under

pressure, you build stronger relationships and are respected. And, of course, an invaluable benefit is that you can walk away from any interaction feeling proud of yourself rather than questioning what the other person thinks about you. All the signs point to the same conclusion: If you want to stay calm, confident, and productive when the pressure's on, you must control what you can control.

Your Ideal Day

Practice having an intention by performing what I call the "Ideal Day" exercise. It helps you gain clarity on how you want to spend time and what you want the quality of your experience to be. First, write down what an ideal work day would look like. For example, what would you do (or not do). What would you have time for and what kinds of things would you accomplish (or not accomplish). How would you describe your feelings, and your experience. Be as detailed as you can. If you're like most people, your Ideal Day will be pretty close to the picture of the way things will be when you are "in control" by following the 50% rule.

Next, write down what your typical day actually looks like. Then, compare the two. Most people have an eye-opening revelation about the gap between their current day and their Ideal Day. For example, a common theme among many participants in my training on resilience is how much built-in time the Ideal Day would include for "thinking" and "reflection," as compared with their current days, which were comprised of back-to-back meetings in different locations. They saw a stark difference between their current day and Ideal Day. As a result, they were able to restructure their days to have time to reflect. This enabled them to do work they are uniquely qualified to do and, therefore, made them better leaders and business owners.

Post your Ideal Day description up on your wall. Revisit and update it as needed. Your Ideal Day is the antidote to the out-of-control aspects of your current day. A clear picture enables you to act intentionally in the interest of creating that Ideal Day. This doesn't mean that people will suddenly stop interrupting you or crises will no longer erupt. Nor does it mean that you'll stop having too much to do. But by following the techniques in the rest of this book, you will know how to take control of your 50% and steer yourself toward your Ideal Day.

In sum, the 50% rule changes your experience from one in which events happen to you to one in which you are in charge. It's a reminder not to survive a stressful situation by waiting for it to change. Instead, take initiative and make yourself feel better. Make your own contribution effective and others will follow.

ACTION PLAN

- Think of a current challenging or stressful situation you face. Using Figure 2.2, write down a list that divides the the situation into those aspects you can control, and those you can't. Focus rigorously on the 50% that you can control and make a list of action steps you can take today or this week.
- Take 3 minutes and write down your vision of your Ideal Day. Include how you spend your time, what you think about, what you accomplish, how you feel during the day and how you interact with others. Post that description where you can refer to it often. Start acting with intention to create that Ideal Day as often as possible.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- You can flip your internal "control switch" in any moment from automatic, reactive, and involuntary responses to ones that are within your control. Every time you make an effort, however small, you will change the course of the stress you face. You'll immediately feel better. The problem will either be resolved or be easier to manage.
- Every stressful or challenging situation you face can be divided into those aspects that you can control and those you can't. Focus rigorously and take action on the former.
- The 50% rule ("Be Impeccable for your 50%") is the approach that leads to Success Under Stress. Following this rule dramatically decreases stress and increases performance.
- Follow the 50% rule even when others don't. Regardless of their behavior, your actions determine your success and energy level.
 The benefits of the 50% rule—credibility and trust, confidence, and the ability to switch off the Survival Under Stress cycle and switch on the Success Under Stress cycle—far outweigh the efforts.
- Once you've articulated a desired outcome for a situation, or for your day, you can act intentionally to bring it about. The Ideal Day exercise helps you define a positive intention for the day so you can act in the service of it.



Bulk discounts available. For details visit: www.amacombooks.org/go/specialsales

Or contact special sales: Phone: 800-250-5308

E-mail: specialsls@amanet.org

View all the AMACOM titles at: www.amacombooks.org American Management Association: www.amanet.org

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional service. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Melnick, Sharon.

Success under stress: powerful tools for staying calm, confident, and productive when the pressure's on / Sharon Melnick.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8144-3212-9

 $1. \ \, \text{Job stress.} \quad 2. \ \, \text{Stress management.} \quad 3. \ \, \text{Success in business.} \quad 4. \ \, \text{Quality of work life.} \quad I. \ \, \text{Title.}$

HF5548.85.M45 2013

158.7'2—dc23

2012030861

© 2013 Dr. Sharon Melnick.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

This publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of AMACOM, a division of American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

The scanning, uploading, or distribution of this book via the Internet or any other means without the express permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions of this work and do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials, electronically or otherwise. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

About AMA

American Management Association (www.amanet.org) is a world leader in talent development, advancing the skills of individuals to drive business success. Our mission is to support the goals of individuals and organizations through a complete range of products and services, including classroom and virtual seminars, webcasts, webinars, podcasts, conferences, corporate and government solutions, business books and research. AMA's approach to improving performance combines experiential learning—learning through doing—with opportunities for ongoing professional growth at every step of one's career journey.

Printing number

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1