



Unit 15 Managing Pressure and Maintaining Balance

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Apply a direct understanding of pressure points and their costs and payoffs
- ✓ Speak in terms related to emotional intelligence, optimism, and resilience
- ✓ Create a personalized toolkit for managing stressors and anger
- ✓ Work on priorities and achieve defined goals

Unit 15

Managing Pressure and Maintaining Balance

Under Pressure!

Causes and Costs of Workplace Pressure

Your workplace is the place that you spend the vast majority of your waking time if you are a full-time employee. You spend more time with your colleagues and workplace than you do your family, so it's good to have work that is challenging yet satisfying, and people with whom you work well.

Workplace pressure comes from many areas. Can you think of some examples?

The costs of workplace pressure are enormous, and come in more than one way.

To an employee, the cost of workplace pressure (or stress) includes feeling disassociated from your peers, disengaged from work, and not knowing from one day to the next what is expected of you. Continued exposure to stress has been linked to illnesses such as high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety, and depression. Those illnesses, as part of a cycle, contribute to increased absenteeism, higher medication costs (which can drive up the employee costs of a benefit plan), and mean that employees who remain at work are working harder to help cover for people who are missing.

To the employer, the costs of workplace pressure can have an immense impact on the bottom line. Disengaged workers leave in droves, which means that the company is constantly recruiting, interviewing, orienting and training employees (an expensive process). In addition, the employer risks having a lot of knowledge leave their company to go work somewhere else, and some of that knowledge can be hard to instill in new employees. In addition, as employees deal with medical issues (especially if they are absent from work), there is more cost for the employer to manage.

There is a cost of workplace pressure that is also felt by the community and society. Our communities flourish when they are supported by people who are contributing positively and who help one another. Doing that requires a certain degree of health and resilience.

If your answers range from **76-100**, it's time to make some very deliberate changes in your life to stop the negative effects that come from managing high levels of pressure in so many areas. Once you have finished this course, give yourself 30 days or so to see where you are, and take this assessment again. If your scores remain high, consider working with a coach, a mentor, or someone very special to you, in order to help get things in order.

What the Statements Mean

When I get up in the morning I don't look forward to doing what I need to do.

When we wake up dreading the day or not looking forward to it our whole day can unwind in a negative light. When you wake up, avoid the temptation to check your phone for messages that have arrived through the night. Instead, focus on something to be grateful for – however small it is – and benefit from positive intention and the power of your mind to influence your mood.

My personal life is not very much fun.

If things are going badly, it can be really hard to find things that are fun or give us something to laugh about. Instead of looking for those things, create them yourself. Connect with people who share your values, who approach life positively, and avoid people who are negative or who pick on you.

I work in a position where I have very little control over the work that I do or the order that I do it.

Workplace engagement studies have demonstrated that having control over the work we do is a big part of liking what we do. If your job is not contributing positively to your outlook, then you need to look at what you can do to contribute to being part of a positive, engaged workforce. And, if the problem really is the workplace there are people in the community you can access to help you locate that new job that brings you satisfaction.

I never have time or energy to exercise.

This is an excuse that lots of people share, so don't fret if you are leaning on it too. Make a decision about what you want to do with it, instead. Lots of people today feel exhausted and unmotivated, despite knowing that exercise actually gives us energy. You have to decide to take the stairs instead of the elevator, get a few friends together and walk, or borrow someone's energetic dog and take him for a walk!

On my days off from work, I sleep in as late as possible.

There are many benefits we get from going to bed and getting up at the same time each day. Avoid the temptation to sleep as a way to recover from feelings of overwhelm and instead take advantage of that time you are finding to get the things done that you are putting off. Your body will thank you for sticking to the predictability of that pattern.

In the last 12 months, I have had at least two colds, illnesses, or infections that have interfered with my usual activities.

If we are run down and things are out of balance, we tend to succumb to more illness than we do otherwise. Repeated illness can be a sign that your immune system needs some help (and/or maybe you are in the public a lot!), and you will find that achieving balance and looking after your health will make a big difference in how you feel.

I am always working towards other things, like a vacation, retirement, or an evening out.

Live for today, and in the moment. If you are always working for something in the future you are missing out on what's happening today.

I tend to volunteer for a lot of things: helping out the less fortunate, community functions or teams, looking after aging parents, and/or wherever I am needed.

Sometimes we are natural helpers and cannot say no to anyone. Other times, we do not say no to others in order to avoid looking after ourselves. Make sure you understand the reasons that you are volunteering and that it makes you feel good to do so. If you are saying yes to everything and your life is suffering because of it, then it's time to recruit some help and learn how to draw some healthy boundaries.

When I am busy, I forget to eat.

Managing your life includes making a commitment to eat properly. If you are so busy that you forget to eat, you will wear yourself out. These days, there are lots of convenient sources for healthy, quick meals to support your physical and mental health.

I don't have two or three months of expenses in the bank in case of emergencies.

Financial pressure adds a lot of strain to our sense of well-being, and managing money is an essential life skill. Financial experts teach their clients to have three months' worth of expenses saved at all times so that if things go awry, we can continue a basic lifestyle.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Identifying Your Pressure Points

Most work environments aren't static. Some days we are productive, while other days we aren't as productive as we could be. Some workplaces are more stressful than others and even an easygoing day can be turned upside down by something unanticipated.

Have you ever noticed that some people seem able to roll with just about anything that comes along, and others seem less able to tolerate the unexpected? Often times, it is not so much of a problem that things are out of control, it's that we struggle with change or a surprise that we did not or could not anticipate. If things are predictable, we can set up a solid project plan, and we know how to respond.

What Are Your Pressure Points?

Go through the list below and select the pressure points that apply to you. There are blank rows on the next page if you want to add your own items.

	A difficult person (co-worker, manager, or me!)
	Changing priorities (manager, colleague, head office, or me!)
	Not enough resources to do the job properly
	No feedback from the boss
	No idea how what I do fits into the bigger picture or the company's strategic plan

	I don't like my job any more
	Competition among my colleagues
	Balancing health issues with trying to do the best job I can
	Demanding customers
	Competition from within the industry
	Challenges to our reputation
	Managing time

Now, circle the two or three items that you feel you can influence.

Creating an Action Plan

Now that you have identified what your pressure points are, and you have narrowed the list to things that you can influence, it's time to get ready to do something about them!

For each pressure point that you have circled in the section above, create a brief but detailed action plan. Your plan needs to include the following:

- A definition of the issue
- The date for when you will start your action plan
- The goal(s) that you want to achieve
- Who you will ask for support (a mentor, colleague, manager, etc.)
- The benchmarks you will use so you know you are keeping on track
- Date you will have implemented the change
- How you will celebrate your accomplishment (this is big stuff – reward yourself!)
- Date you will follow up to make sure the changes stick

Pressure Point One

A definition of the issue



The date for when you will start your action plan

The goal(s) that you want to achieve

Who you will ask for support (a mentor, colleague, manager, etc.)

The benchmarks you will use so you know you are keeping on track

Date you will have implemented the change

How you will celebrate your accomplishment (this is big stuff – reward yourself!)

Date you will follow up to make sure the changes stick

Pressure Point Two

A definition of the issue

The date for when you will start your action plan

The goal(s) that you want to achieve

Who you will ask for support (a mentor, colleague, manager, etc.)

The benchmarks you will use so you know you are keeping on track

Date you will have implemented the change

How you will celebrate your accomplishment (this is big stuff – reward yourself!)

Date you will follow up to make sure the changes stick

Pressure Point Three

A definition of the issue

The date for when you will start your action plan

The goal(s) that you want to achieve

Who you will ask for support (a mentor, colleague, manager, etc.)

The benchmarks you will use so you know you are keeping on track

Date you will have implemented the change

How you will celebrate your accomplishment (this is big stuff – reward yourself!)

Date you will follow up to make sure the changes stick

Facing Problems Head On

When we're having trouble at work, it can be easy to try and abandon our goals to make changes because let's face it, this stuff can be hard! If it were easy, everyone would want to make the changes and these problems wouldn't exist!

Making changes is serious business, and there are several steps you can take to make sure that your goals are achievable. Our goal model is called SPIRIT, which means that goals are written to be: Specific, include Prizes, Individualized, Reviewed, Inspiring, and Timed.

When you are creating big goals (and we recommend that you do!), you may need to break them into several small, achievable objective or goal statements that will help you get where you want to go. Good goals have SPIRIT as you look at the things you want now and into the future.

Specific

Be specific about what you want or don't want to achieve. The result should be tangible and measurable. "Deal with my difficult person" is pretty ambiguous; "Make an appointment to meet with my difficult person" is specific.

Prizes

Reward yourself at different points in the goal, particularly if it's long-term. If your goal is to meet with someone that you have some challenges with, you might treat yourself to a special little treat (like a walk along your favorite lake) just for booking the appointment, and something a little bigger for after the meeting. For bigger goals, check your bucket list to see if there are things on there that could be good rewards!

Individual

The goal must be something that you want to do. If your boss wants you to talk to that difficult person but you don't, you're not going to want to work towards the goal. When your boss is setting targets for you at work, try to find an aspect of it that is meaningful to you and that you can connect to. (This is where working with people and organizations that have similar values to you is helpful.)

Review

Review your progress periodically. Does the goal still make sense? Are you stuck? Do you need to adjust certain parts of it? Meet with a mentor or accountability partner?

Inspiring

Frame the goal positively. Make it fun to accomplish. For example, you could make a poster of the end result, frame it, and post it on the wall.

Timed

Give yourself a deadline for achieving the goal, or each benchmark that it includes. We are more diligent when we have deadlines!

Example: Creating a Professional Relationship with My Difficult Person

I am excited to be speaking with and meeting my difficult person by the end of this month. The ironing out of our differences (productivity and meeting deadlines) is important to me, as is having peace within the work team. I am looking forward to understanding more about this person and what makes them tick. After the meeting, I will reward myself with a long walk in my favorite park with both of my dogs.

Seeking Help

When you read the goal statement in the last session, it looks like it could be pretty daunting. There are not many people who want pressures to build at work, although most people want to avoid dealing with difficult relationships there. If you feel like the conversation is going to veer off track, or that it could put even more strain on a challenging relationship, it's time to enlist some help.

You don't necessarily want to invite more people into the conversation (although you might), but you may want to speak with a coach or mentor, especially if they are great relationship builders and have strong conflict resolution skills or a skill set that you need.

We are often encouraged to think independently, stand on our own two feet, and not to rely too much on others. However, when it comes to dealing with stressors in the workplace, especially ones that you feel are pretty big to tackle on your own, it's okay to approach people for help. Workplace coaches, mentors, sometimes your boss, or a supporter from the union (where appropriate) can all be great guides on your journey.

Before you ask just anyone for help, here are some guidelines:

- Does the person you want help from have a good track record for helping people?
- Do you know specifically what kind of help you are asking them for, so that you can make the most of your time?
- Are you ready to share your goals with your helper? (After all, they need to know what they are helping you with!)
- Are you willing to accept what they say and then move ahead with your action plan?

If you can answer "yes" to all of these questions, it's time to approach your mentor for some help. If not, review your goals and then go through the questions again. People cannot help you if you hold back information or insight, and they won't want to help you if you are simply asking for favors and not doing the work that needs doing.

Take a moment to consider that not all mentors, physicians, or counselors are able to deal with all things. Pressure, stress, depression, and anxiety often require the help of a specialist such as a mediator or counselor. Make sure you find the people that you need. If you talk to your doctor or a therapist, be honest about what is going on and what kind of help you need so they can point you in the right direction.

Have a look back at the three goals that you are working on and who you identified as potential helpers. If you did not select a helper, do so now.

- Goal One: _____
- Goal Two: _____
- Goal Three: _____

Emotional Intelligence

The Seven Human Emotions

Leading social scientists and researchers agree that there are seven emotional expressions that are basic to every culture. They can be difficult to isolate, since our faces are often displaying more than one emotion at a time. We see this when people smile but their eyes seem sad.

When you are easily able to read and understand how others are feeling, you can adjust your approach to reflect and respect a particular situation. One major tenet of emotional intelligence is to teach people to recognize the seven obvious emotions, as well as hidden emotions, by carefully reading facial expressions.

Sadness

Sadness comes with a set of identifiable marks including the eyebrows being drawn upwards in the middle, and curving down toward the end, and there is a slight vertical furrow between the eyes. When these signals are combined, we refer to it as Darwin's grief muscle. The mouth points downward.

Anger

When we are angry, we can press our lips together so hard that the upper lip almost disappears. The eyes may widen across the upper eyelids, while the lower eyelids are contracted. The inner corners of the eyebrows pull downward, and there is often enough pressure there to create a furrowed brow.

Fear

A frightened person's eyebrows can be trying to stand horizontal, with wrinkles across the forehead. Similar to anger, people who are frightened may open the upper eyelid more widely and show more of the whites of their eyes, while the corners of their mouth pull the lips into a horizontal line.

Happiness

Happiness is generally accompanied by rising cheeks, and we describe the accompanying smile as going up to someone's eyes when the muscles around the eyes tighten (hence the way that smile lines lead to permanent lines around the eyes). Authentic smiles, also called a Duchenne smile, were first described by French neurologist Guillaume Benjamin Amand Duchenne de Boulogne, and are characterized by those eye wrinkles, whereas a forced smile is missing those distinguishing smile lines.

Surprise

Raised upper eyelids, in addition to exposing additional whites of the eye often accompany surprise. The mouth or jaw may also open as a part of the response.

Contempt

Rolling your eyes is quite common in expressions of contempt, in addition to the left corner of the lip being pulled out asymmetrically, creating a dimple.

Disgust

When we smell something bad, we may wrinkle our nose and this is also common when someone is disgusted. People who are feeling disgusted may also generate wrinkles at the top of their nose, and the upper lip may also be raised.

What Do Emotions Tell Us?

Emotion	What It Tells Us
Sadness	Lost something of value
Anger	Way is blocked or get out of my way
Fear	Possible threat – be prepared
Happiness	Gained something of value, the way is safe
Surprise	Something unexpected happened
Contempt	Not worthy of care, hardening of feelings
Disgust	Rules are violated

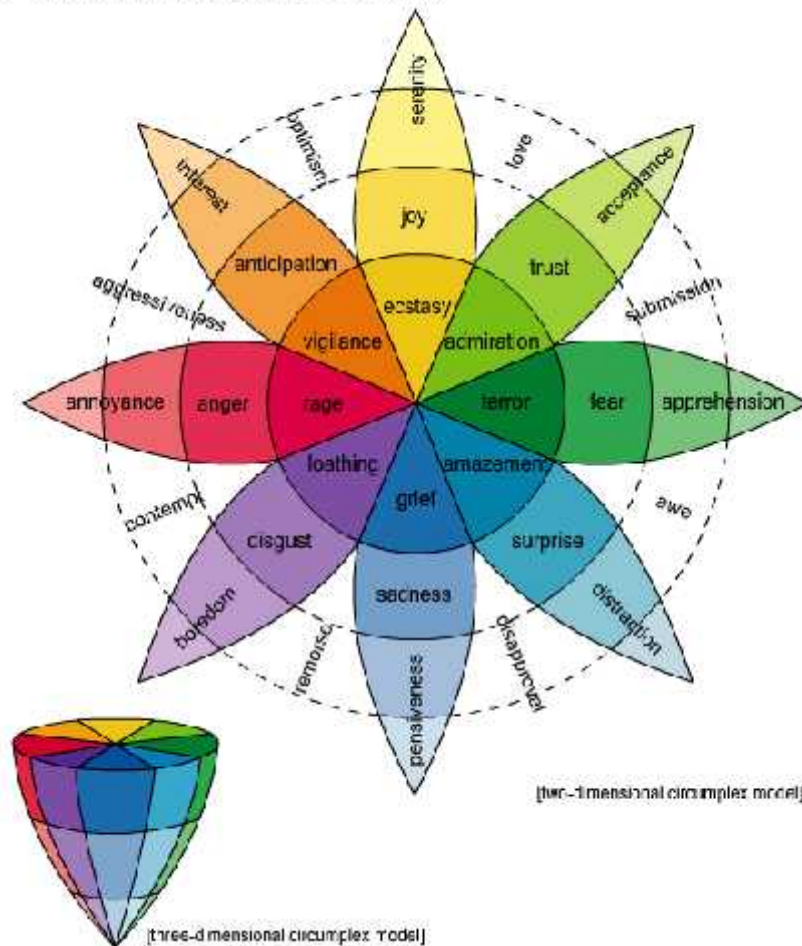
Emotional expressions don't tell us the cause that prompts the response. You have to take into account the situation in which the emotion was expressed and how your own emotions affect the situation in order to understand it. As you try to understand emotions that you witness, it is important to remember that emotions in themselves are neither positive nor negative; it is what we do with the emotion that creates the outcome.

The Emotional Map

At the core of the emotional map are the eight emotions that are considered the primary emotions. Emotions that are the complete opposite of each other are located across from each other in the circle. The model indicates how emotions can combine with one another to form more complex emotions.

For example, grief and loathing combine to form the complex emotion of remorse. The complex emotions in the open spaces are a mix of the two primary emotions that are next to each other.

Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions



Validating Emotions in Others

Someone who is emotionally intelligent is not just able to measure their own emotions, but also understands how to recognize what other people are feeling. To do this, use the VALUE technique when someone is talking:

V	Validate
A	Ask questions
L	Listen to the vocal (the tone) as well as the verbal (the words)
U	Understand the meaning that can be behind the words
E	Empathize

Validation does not mean solving a problem or offering a solution. When we validate we acknowledge that we heard what the other person was saying. When someone is talking, listen without interrupting. Paraphrase, nod your head, or make appropriate listening responses to what they have said to show you are listening. Allow for pauses and silence.

You can also use the SOLER technique while you are listening:

S	Sit quietly with your arms and legs uncrossed. Crossed limbs can be interpreted as unwilling to listen, closed-minded.
O	Maintain an open posture.
L	Lean slightly forward in the direction of the speaker.
E	Maintain eye contact . Be sensitive, though – some people are uncomfortable with extended eye contact.
R	Stay relaxed . Pay particular attention to your shoulders and neck.

Communication Tips and Tricks

Ask open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no response. Ask the person for their perception of the problem.

Listen to what the person has to say. Defer judgment on what someone is saying and focus on finding out more. Don't jump in with a solution when someone is starting to express their concerns. Continue to listen until the speaker has finished.

Understand the non-verbal clues. Look at their body language. Is it consistent with what they are saying? The

words we use can either be confirmed or denied by our non-verbal cues like body language, fidgeting, and eye contact.

Empathize, don't just sympathize. You do not need to agree, but you should try to understand why the person feels the way they do. Do you really understand the other person's perspective?

What is Optimism?

A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities; an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties.

- Reginald B. Mansell

Optimism and pessimism are attitudes which affect the way we see the world and what is happening around us. Optimists see success as something which is the result of their own hard work, whereas a pessimist views success as being the result of good luck or fate.

Optimists see something like the loss of a job as a short-term problem, the result of a lack of work in their field. They tell themselves that they will work hard to find another job, and as a result, another job will be secured. A pessimist sees a job loss as someone else's doing: their boss does not like them, the system is against them, life is not fair. When a pessimist loses their job, they see it as a huge barrier, and may even take it to the extent that they will never find work again.

In his longitudinal research and best-selling book *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, Dr. Martin Seligman describes how differently optimists and pessimists view the world, and also teaches how to shift our thinking to be more optimistic. The benefits to optimism are indisputable, as evidenced by repeated studies. Optimists have better overall health, live longer, and are able to more easily adapt to even the most harsh or horrible circumstances. Pessimists on the other hand, suffer more incidents of ill health, including increased clinical depression and anxiety.

Pessimists can learn to change attitudes and be more optimistic. Not only do they become healthier, but they also get more happiness from life in doing so.

Being an optimist is not always an approach that you can take in light of difficulty or adversity, however. If you want to focus on achievement, focus on improving morale, inspire, or teach, Dr. Seligman recommends an optimistic approach. However, pessimism also has a certain place, and even some benefits. Even the very optimistic can become pessimistic at times, and pessimism does have a way of looking at things realistically, which some optimists may fail to do.

In a study of optimists and pessimists, death rates were compared. Every 10 point increase in pessimism was associated with a 19% increase in death rate. Staying optimistic means that we will live longer.

- From *Learned Optimism* by Dr. Martin Seligman

Managing Anger

Anger is a universal experience; we all get angry from time to time. This session is not about teaching you to never become angry, or to hide your anger. It really is about managing your anger.

You don't have to be a psychologist to know that managing our anger is something we need to do well. The goal of anger management is to reduce your emotional feelings and the physiological arousal that anger provokes (like when your heart races, your breathing speeds up, or you feel like running away). You can't get rid of, or avoid, things or people who anger you, but you can learn to control what you do about it.

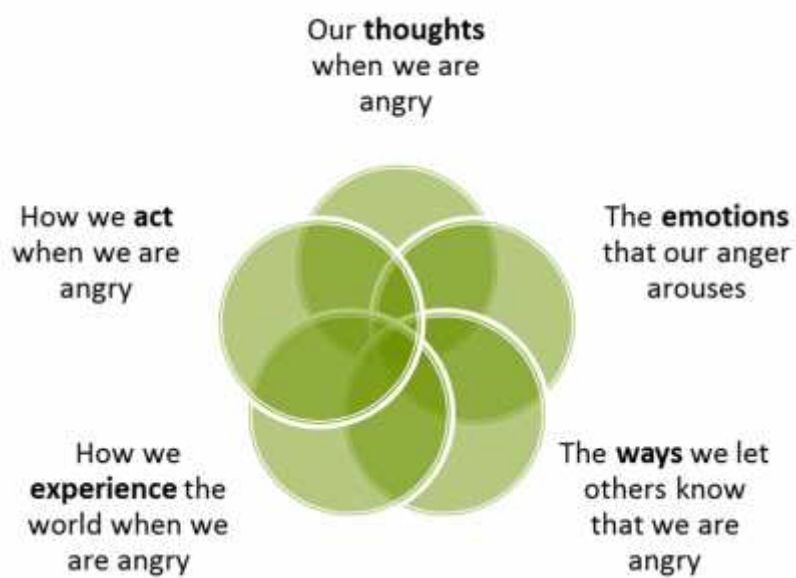
What we really want to do is to have a new type of relationship with our emotions; a relationship where we manage them rather than letting them manage us.

The most instinctive way to express anger is to respond aggressively. It is a natural way to respond to a threat, and it inspires powerful feelings and behaviors which help us fight back and defend ourselves if we are under attack. A certain amount of anger, then, is necessary for survival. In addition, **sometimes we resist saying what needs to be said** because we do not want to upset the status quo. However, without some degree of conflict, there may be no change or growth whatsoever, and that isn't good either.

Self-awareness is a key element for managing your own anger. The use of anger management skills presupposes that you know when you are angry and recognize that anger as a cue that something is wrong. Expressing your anger in an assertive, but not aggressive, way is safe and healthy.

The Five Dimensions of Anger

To understand and develop the skills associated with anger management, think of anger as five interrelated dimensions, all operating simultaneously.



For example, what you think when you are angry influences how you feel, how you feel when you are angry influences how you communicate, how you communicate affects how you think, and how you think affects how you behave.

Making Connections

Think of your own anger.

Can you identify the things that you normally think, feel, say, and do when you are angry?

How does the world look to you when you are angry?

Expressing Yourself

When we feel angry, our best tools can be the ones related to good communication, including listening, asking questions, and speaking assertively. The next time you are angry, try listening first, and then consider using these tools.

I Messages

Speaking articulately can be hard when you're upset or angry. It's easier to communicate with others if we stick with our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and avoid direct or implied criticism of the other person. One way to do that is to stick with "I" messages, expressed in a matter-of-fact, non-judgmental tone of voice.

You Message	I Message
You talk too loudly.	I have sensitive hearing.
You should send out an agenda.	I'd like to know what we're going to discuss in the meeting tomorrow so I can bring the right information with me.

If you are trying to address a particular root cause of your anger (such as someone else's behavior), you can use this same type of message to give feedback.

The Assertive Formula

You can also use this formula to express your feelings assertively.

Step	Goal	Example
Step 1	Non-judgmentally describe a specific behavior of the other person.	When you...
Step 2	Describe, as specifically as possible, the effects this behavior is having, or the practical problems it is causing in your life.	The effects are...

Step 3	Describe how you feel as a result, without using the expression, "you make me..."	I feel...
Step 4	Describe what you want, preferably after you give the other person a chance to state what they think might be done.	I prefer/would like...

Example: "When you leave your papers all over my office, it causes it to be cluttered and I feel disorganized and upset. I would like it if you could pick your papers up when you are done."

Making Connections

Rephrase the following statements using the model we just discussed. We have included some blank space for you to create your own statements.

Original Statement	Rephrased Statement
You missed that deadline! I want to fire you right now!	
You are late again. You're always late and making me look bad!	

Getting Organized

Working on Priorities

Some of the big stressors for feeling in control in the workplace include being able to keep on top of priorities, to respond to things as needed, and to be as productive as you can be. This isn't always easy, especially if you work in an organization where fires that you have to react to are constantly flaring up. However, keeping everything as organized as possible helps you respond and then get back on track as soon as you can.

Have a look at your to-do list. How is it? Reasonable? Crazy?

One of the best techniques that we have found for managing the priority list includes taking a look at the list and categorizing each item as "must do" or "nice to do."

Put the things you **must** do in order of priority. Restrict the list to **ten items** that will take under eight hours if you are doing the list daily, or 40 hours if you are doing it weekly and working full time. (It's just not feasible to work on lists bigger than that. If you have a longer list, you will need to speak with a mentor, supervisor, or your HR department to get things into a reasonable shape.)

Must-do items are the ones that are important to you and to your organization, and they have consequences if they do not get done. EVERYTHING else goes on the nice-to-do list. At the beginning of each day, commit to working only on what is on the must-do list. If something else comes along that must be done, add it to the must-do list, and move an item from the must-do list to the nice-to-do list. Be diligent about this: most of us cannot manage a list longer than ten items, and getting things done and off the list means you must focus on what you've determined is important.

If you are having a difficult time with moving things off your must-do list and on to the nice-to-do list, speak with your mentor or supervisor. Their role includes helping you with this kind of prioritizing and it also makes them aware of how much is on your plate at one time. They may have some good suggestions about how to get through everything without an expectation that you can do it all!

Be clear and diligent about **ONLY** working on what is on your must-do list so that you can get things done. This creates a clear boundary for you as well as the people you work and live with.

Doing It!

Write your to-do list here.

How can you ensure that you work on the Must-Do list tomorrow?

Personal Action Plan

I am already doing these things well:

I want to improve these areas:

I have these resources to help me:

As a result of what I have learned in this workshop, I am going to...	My target date is...	I will know I have succeeded when...	I will follow up with myself on...

Further Reading:

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