



STOP STRESSING AND GET YOUR LIFE BACK

ARE THE CRACKS STARTING TO SHOW IN THE MANAGEMENT OF YOUR BUSINESS, AND YOUR LIFE? IT'S TIME FOR SOME INTERVENTION, SAYS **FIONA CLARK**, BECAUSE SHE HAS SEEN WHAT STRESS CAN DO TO PEOPLE.

We live in a world of 'busyness'; a world where there's not enough time to get things done. For small to medium business owners there seems to be a never ending 'to do' list and it never stops.

We're always thinking about business and we don't get the luxury to completely switch off and step away from it.

Over the years I've seen the impact of stress and what it can do. My first career was nursing. I was a surgical and intensive care nurse, and cardio-thoracic was one of my areas of clinical speciality.

However, what I saw on a daily basis was the effect of stress on peoples' hearts and health.

It's only now, many years later, that I can still see that impact through the business owners I work with in my coaching/consulting business.

I see many people stressed, overwhelmed, and frustrated at where they're at in their business. Most people have set high standards for themselves and where they 'should' be. They 'should' have more clients; they 'should' be making more money; they 'should' be doing better than they are by now.

While I am all for setting goals, KPIs, targets and clear defined plans with action on how to get there, in recent years I'm also telling my clients to 'be kinder to yourself'.

We're the ones putting ourselves under pressure – and is it to match our expectations, or are we comparing ourselves to others?

So let's look at some of the common stresses, and how to know when it's going too far.

YOUR BUSINESS STRESS CHECK:

Do you recognise any of these symptoms?

- Lack of money and tight cashflow.
- Working long hours – 50 hours or more.
- Working weekends and most nights – and it's becoming 'normal'.
- It's hard to prioritise because everything seems urgent.
- Not enough money to pay the bills or taxes.
- Getting frustrated with staff and clients.
- Feeling the physical effects – high blood pressure, stomach ulcers, headaches, high cholesterol, on more medication now than five years ago, etc.
- Feels like you're on a treadmill and it never stops.

If you can relate to the above, then it's a good time to stop; to 'stage an intervention'!

We can only handle so much before our bodies start to say 'enough is enough'. That's when busy stressed business owners or high achieving corporate professionals sometimes end up in the cardiac ward having a triple by-pass operation following a major heart attack.

A TALE OF TWO BUSINESS MEN

Let me tell you a story.

I was 24 years old and working in the cardio-thoracic ward at Auckland's Greenlane Hospital. I worked in the high dependency unit (HDU) – the step-down unit after patients are transferred from the intensive care unit (ICU). There were two patients in their early 40s; both had a triple by-pass operation. They were conscious, breathing and newly transferred to the unit. They seemed to be type 'A' personalities and were doing well.

During my shift we started chatting and I learnt about their lives and what had happened.

What really struck me was how each patient was handling their 'second chance' at life (it's very likely they would have died if they didn't have the surgery).

One gentleman was CEO of a large corporate. He realised he'd been given a second chance and said, "I'm not going to blow it".

He said something along the lines of, "It really makes you sit up and rethink what's most important to you." He decided that he was going to retire, and move to the Coromandel to set up a market garden.

However, the other man, the managing director of a large company, made a call on his mobile and half an hour later his PA arrived with his laptop and a briefcase of work to do.

To this day I wonder if he is still with us. I hope so, because he really was given a second chance in life.

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But it's what we do with that second chance that maps out our future.

Two men, same situation, two totally different decisions.

MORE STRESS

What I'm seeing now in SMBs is a lot of men and women who, on the surface, appear to have everything under control. However, after several meetings they start telling me about their depression, high blood pressure, sleepless nights, how they feel anxious or stressed all the time, and how it's affecting things at home. They don't want to talk to their partners because they, in turn, will get stressed (they don't know I was once a registered nurse).

Why this is important is because our health affects our business, and our business affects our family life, and vice versa.

I'm not going to say that you must only work four days a week, or completely change your diet and eat raw or paleo food, or do yoga five days a week. But what I will say is: please check in with yourself each week. How are you feeling? Slow down and 'notice' what is happening with your mindset and how you're feeling physically.

Because as business owners we are some of the hardest working, most committed and driven people around. And while we need the perseverance, and an attitude of never giving up, we also need to have a 'life' as well as a business.

So my last advice is be kind to yourself; take the pressure off, and think of all the good things that are happening in your business.

Forget about those 'shoulds' and focus on your 'wins' each week. It's amazing how good that will make you feel instead. **NZB**



FIONA CLARK IS DIRECTOR OF BREAKTHROUGH BUSINESS SOLUTIONS – BUSINESS GROWTH SPECIALISTS FOR SMALL TO MEDIUM BUSINESSES. VISIT WWW.BUSINESSGROWTHCOACH.CO.NZ