

# NZBusiness

The owner manager's magazine

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MAGAZINE

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remarkable story.

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**TAKING**

# **TIME OUT FROM BUSINESS**

PLANNING TIME OUT FROM YOUR BUSINESS TO DE-STRESS  
AND REINVIGORATE YOURSELF FOR THE YEAR AHEAD IS ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE.  
*NZBusiness* REVEALS THE HOLIDAY STRATEGIES OF FIVE SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS OWNERS.

— By Kevin Kevany. —

For those of us fortunate enough to have businesses which can afford us some time-out over the Christmas holidays and summer break, this is the time of year we look forward to – to ‘veg out’, put the feet up, catch a tan, read a book and reacquaint ourselves with family and friends.

But it can also be a time to reflect on what worked and what didn’t in the past 12 months. To de-stress, sure, but to also refresh our business outlook in these volatile times.

To that end we compiled a cross-section of leading players and personalities from the SME (small to medium enterprise) sector and asked them how they deal with stress, and what techniques they use (if they were prepared to share those). Could stress be positive?

We also asked where and how they ‘escape from things stressful?’

But first some stats. Data shows that one-in-seven adult

Kiwis are currently on medication for high blood pressure, and according to a study by one of the world’s leading universities, the University College of London, which analysed 600,000 people, those working 55 hours a week had an increased risk of a stroke a third greater than those on the standard 40 hour week.

Many business owners and managers we’ve spoken to over the years are in that bracket, but most seem to be immune to the significant danger of heavy hours engaged in never-ending, boring work, with little likelihood of improvement in the future.

Daniel King, director of About Health, a provider of lifestyle supplements, says two or more people faced with the same situation will react to it differently. “This is because it’s not the stressor or situation that determines the response, but our reaction to the situation.”

Turning to the effect stress has on the body, he points out the many different triggers which activate it, including: financial,



Richard Conway.



Fiona Clark.



Brent Kelly.

emotional, physical, relationship, simply 'living too hard' and work-based factors.

"When these triggers go on for a long time they can cause chronic stress, which can have a severe impact on our health. Whether it is physical or emotional stress the body responds in the same way and generally follows these three stages:

1. "Alarm stage (flight or fight) – the immediate response to stress. The body releases adrenaline, increases heart-rate and breathing and diverts blood-flow to our muscles, so we can fight or run away."
2. "Resistance stage – this is the response to prolonged stress. We have increased cortisol secretion from the adrenal glands; increase in blood pressure; and the liver converts protein into glucose for a ready supply of energy. Continuation of this phase can result in chronic hypertension, diabetes and lead to the next stage of stress."
3. "Exhaustion stage – This is the point of 'burn-out' or 'adrenal fatigue'. Our body's cells and organs can no longer function properly, which can result in serious diseases occurring."

#### Positive disposition

Richard Conway, founder and CEO of search-engine specialist Pure SEO, is a relatively new arrival on these shores and has spent time with mega-entrepreneur Richard Branson.

"Fortunately I have a naturally positive disposition, so I tend not to let negative stress get on top of me," explains Conway. "Generally I find the things that stress me out the most are usually people-related.

"If I have something 'big' on my mind I need to resolve, I generally do this in three ways:

1. "I take a walk, without distractions (no phone, music etc.) and let my mind wander. By the time I get back to the office I've usually got some clarity.
2. "If I wake up at two or three in the morning with something on my mind, I stay awake until I have resolved the issue.
3. "I run my thought process by my wife or business partners; talking about the stressful issue usually brings about a decision or a resolution."

Conway confesses to being "naturally excitable" and having

a tendency to "count my chickens before they hatch", but is learning to temper this, "albeit it is an innate feature I can't always control."

#### Rural peace and privacy

Greg Sheehan has already been a big-wheel finance boss for multinationals and is founder and CEO of RightWay, one of the country's fastest growing accountancy and business advisory firms. He's doing it from Martinborough in the Wairarapa, which he reckons provides rural peace and privacy, along with easy access to Wellington's business opportunities.

So he should be 'halfway there' in the world we all dream about working in, right?

"Growing a business at speed (four to 70 people in four years and a likely doubling again this year) comes with a guaranteed massive dose of high-octane stress," says Sheehan. "Most of this is good stress. It's the result of growth. Growth brings change. I love change so that's a good start.

"But I also love change because I'm on top of it. For all my shortcomings, one thing I am reasonably proficient at is time management and task control. Staying on top of that allows me to breathe – figuratively and literally – welcoming the change more openly than having it landed on me.

"Remaining an eternal optimist is also critical in a high-stress, high-change environment."

Sheehan also happens to own "a small pinot noir vineyard", as you do, in the Wairarapa and loves doing a 'work detox' by "spending mindless hours pruning", or some other form of escape, where he can look at the distant mountains while working.

"Having some music in my ears also works in that setting," Sheehan admits.

#### Short breaks and planning

Fiona Clark, director of BreakThrough Business Solutions, a dynamic business consultancy, provides coaching and strategic planning, amongst other services, and leads the charge when it comes to guiding business women on how to be successful and still have family time. She understands the pressures of juggling to stay on top, especially while growing a business.







## Dealing with the office party, Christmas festivities and BBQ circuit

It's about having a plan to succeed, says About Health's Daniel King. "Set yourself up for success by making a written plan. Decide now (yes, right now) what limits you're setting for yourself. Don't leave it until you are standing over a heaving buffet table, nobody's that strong!"

"Writing your goal, limits and intention down commits you more fully to them, and provides a useful reminder of what your 'best self' ultimately wanted for you at a time of less temptation. Some useful parameters might be:

- Resist all pre-meal snacks.
- Stick to healthy portion sizes.
- Avoid second helpings.
- Set a maximum number of alcoholic drinks.
- Fill a plate once rather than 'grazing' on uncountable canapés.

"When you're an owner of a business it can be stressful – there's always a lot to stay on top of and you end up wearing lots of different hats. It's often not something you walk away from on a Friday night and completely switch off until Monday morning.

"I know a lot of business owners work in the evening during the week, and the weekend, to keep on track of what needs to be done. I've been there myself when I started out, and was flat out establishing the company."

However, Clark's learnt the need to take short breaks – along with all those we spoke to.

"It's also interesting that when you do take regular breaks, you end up being more productive; can think more clearly; make better business decisions; and handle situations better and easier.

"One thing that works for me is planning! The busier I get, the more organised I need to be.

I plan every day, every week, have a 90-day plan and a 12-month plan to keep me and the business on track. It only takes me five minutes at the start of each day, but by thinking about what my priorities are that day, and writing them down means I get it out of my head, and can cross it off when done."

### Mindfulness

If your title is 'Chief Bubble-Blower' you surely are going to be immune to stress and all the other vicissitudes of life? We asked Anna Guenther, who leads crowdfunding platform PledgeMe, based in Wellington, how she shapes up.

"In business the highs and lows often come at the same time. The most stressful things often come quickly and end quickly. 'General busyness' can add a level of everyday stress on top too.

"You sometimes feel like you're building a plane while it's flying," explains Guenther.

"I'm really open and transparent with my team and not afraid to ask for help when I need it. Oh, and we always celebrate the successes when they happen. I've also been gathering tips on how other business people deal with stress. Talking to friends, mentors, and listening to podcasts.

"One mindfulness tip I use every morning is to focus on my breathing while listening to my favourite song. That means I have three-minutes at the start of my day to centre myself and have a bit of fun.

"There're lots of things you can do in this space! Recently one of my shareholders gave me a mindfulness colouring-in book – which another campaign creator crowdfunded through us.

"Another technique I have is delegation, although I pretty much have delegated the delegating to my team who are eager to take tasks off me, so that I can concentrate on the big-picture, important stuff."

Guenther reckons she's the worst person to ask about taking breaks, having worked on PledgeMe for a solid four years. Starting in 2016 she plans to:

- 'Staycate'.
- Visit family. "Some of whom live on farms, which means amazing food and few people. Awesome when I'm used to surviving on canapes and crowds!"
- Spend weekends away in baches booked on AirBnB. "Sometimes with the other PledgeMe founders."



### Getaway time-outs

One of Mangawhai Heads more famous sons, Brent Kelly, R&D director of website design and e-business consultancy Zeald, is another to opt for simple 'getaway time-outs' with his family in Mangawhai Heads, or anywhere out in the bush.

Kelly also enjoys ultra-marathon endurance running, and particularly enjoys offroad/trail events along with the discipline of training for these, despite work pressure and weather constraints. A combination of what he deems typical 'stress release' techniques, like physical exercise, timeout, getting into a totally different environment, are his magic formula.

"Going to the beach with the wife and children, or a bush walk. Spending time with brothers and sisters and parents. It helps keep stresses and problems in perspective."

He also has a particularly interesting take on stress. "Stress is something I have to choose to feel, or allow to affect me. Keeping 'stupidly positive' will always help to keep me solution-focused; which will resolve and improve the situation, and minimize the impact of any stress. By freaking out or getting negative, things will always spiral down.

"Also reminding myself that whatever the situation, whatever happens, life will go on, and any problems or situations are pretty insignificant in the big picture."

### Favourite destinations

RightWay's Sheehan reckons time with family is his absolute passion. "Being able to be 'Greg' (husband, father, brother, son, etc) is super-duper cool.

"I have a couple of top spots. They are so secret I can't share, as my family would make me stand at the back of the BBQ and salad line if I did. It always involves loads of laughter, sun, sand, BBQs, jandals, some good books, some beer, wine and great family food. The odd bit of fishing with the old man is pretty cool too."

No prizes for guessing Richard Conway's first choice for a business trip.

"Necker Island has been my all-time favourite. To be able to spend time with some of the most successful business people in the world in Branson's informal Caribbean location will stay with me forever. The opportunities and knowledge gained from that have been amazing; not least being invited to lunch in Winston Churchill's bunker in London."

Family favourites include an eco-lodge in Danum Valley, Borneo (site of his honeymoon with Emily), "where we saw a host of animals in their primary rain forest environment".

"And spending time with my wife and two young children is vitally important to ensure a happy marriage/family life and a good work/life balance, as well as exploring New Zealand with visitors."

An annual trip to the UK to stay in touch with family there and a Pacific Island visit in winter is also a must, says Conway, during which he allocates an hour a day to stay in touch with the office and clients.

During the year, Fiona Clark can be found skiing with the family at Ruapehu, Cardrona or Queenstown; in the summer it's her local beach, or enjoying a break on a Pacific Island.

"We had a wonderful holiday earlier in 2015, in Rarotonga. There was a lot going on during that time, but it's amazing how you can run your business through your smartphone. So checking and responding to emails once a day was a great balance for me to be aware of what's going on, and still have a great holiday.

"It's a juggle to find that work/life balance sometimes and we hear a lot about all the things we 'should' be doing. But I like the term I read once; it is 'more like a Work Life Mash Up'.

"And I think if you just make it work for you and your family, that's all that matters." **NZB**

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## Never mind the Mistletoe, get the Milk Thistle

If you overdo it with liquid Christmas holiday cheer, take the advice of Daniel King, director of About Health.

"Milk thistle is a herb used to enhance detoxification and protect the liver and body from damage via chemicals (yes, that means alcohol). The liver is one of our most active detoxification organs and has its work cut out for it when you combine rich, fatty or sweet foods with alcohol consumption.

"Active constituents in milk thistle directly protect the liver by binding to toxins as well

as neutralising those which have already entered the cells, reducing their toxic effect. It is also highly antioxidant, protecting us from the free-radical damage generated by party-type activities, such as smoking, drinking and eating charred sausages!

"Better liver-function means fewer unwanted side-effects from overindulgence."

Milk thistle can be taken daily as a general support, says King, and an increased dose can be taken for added protection when needed.