

Capstone Essay

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## Module One

Module One introduced me to Stress Management Coaching and the pressing need for this type of coaching in this fast-paced, overwhelmed world we live in, especially for the past 15 years. It seems with the development of social media, the stress level for all ages has risen to massive proportions. Just last week, I witnessed road rage that ended with a van running off the road into an embankment. Luckily the man driving it was able to stop before it flipped over. Because of the stress that everyone in all walks of life are feeling, there are opportunities for a Stress Management Coach to step forward when people are reaching out for help.

### *The Physical Effects of Stress*

So many people today, in all cultures, are living with some form of stress related to chronic illness with unbalance and the inability to function at 100%. Most people today are living with chemical unbalances in their brains, with anxiety levels reaching critical stages of psychological and psychiatric illnesses such as depression with extreme symptoms of suicide, thoughts of death, social isolation and need professional counseling. With mass shootings, natural disasters, and even road rage happening experiencing crisis fatigue is more than the body can handle in some people. As a stress management coach, when starting out with a new client, it is important to start with an assessment to measure the stress in the person's life. It is also important that the client who reaches out for stress management has a physical exam with their primary physician before coaching begins. If the client is at critical optimal stress, then a referral to a professional counselor is a must!

## Module Two

Module Two explored a more indepth chronic stress that weakens an individual's immune system in addition to strategies for change and recovery. Learning about the differences of stress during Biblical times in comparison to Modern times was interesting in that Jesus also dealt with stress but had the remedy of recovery time. The stress individual's feel today is due to the loss of recovery time because stress is everywhere. The overproduction of stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol creates a fight or flight response and is cause for huge concern today. Consequences of stress attacks our bodies, our mental and emotional wellness, and the pain system in our brains. "Common anxiety and depressive disorders can also be tracked through a person's brain functioning" according to Dr. Daniel Amen who is a highly respected researcher, author, and clinical director on the brain-body connection.

### *Anxiety*

It is true the brain-body connection was created with a natural alarm system known as anxiety. The anxiety feeling serves as a warning that means pay attention to situations around me. When I witnessed the road rage incident, I experienced a slight surge of adrenaline, raising my anxiety level, to say something not good is happening up the road so slow down and proceed with caution. Good anxiety is very important to the human brain-body connection because it is a natural protection. What turns anxiety into bad anxiety is when this alarm never shuts itself off. It keeps going and gets triggered by small things that shouldn't trigger the alarm at all. The other side of this alarm is when the alarm isn't triggered at all. When an individual's anxiety level is too low, it can really get the individual into trouble because there is no right or wrong response

in the brain. Either form of this kind of anxiety can become abnormal and cause greater problems for the individual.

### Module Three

Module Three continued the understanding for the functioning of the human brain and the critical need for sleep in relation to stress management. This is God's antidote for stress, as the scriptures tell us that we are being renewed day by day (for example 2nd Corinthians speaks to this issue). In 2nd Corinthians 4:15, the Apostle Paul reminded us "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." The renewal period remedy, as Dr. Hart drove home in his lecture, is sleep! As I learned in the lecture, all sleep is divided into two basic types called non-dream sleep (Non-REM) and dream sleep (REM) both extremely important for the renewal of our physical and mental well-being.

#### *The Importance of the Sleep Cycle*

It is very true that research shows the 'normal' sleep cycle is in 90 minute intervals, but it is not always true for everyone. The first 80-85 minutes is the non-dream cycle primarily for the purpose of rejuvenating our physical bodies. After exercise or hard labor during the day, the body needs to be repaired in order to function the next day at its optimum level. Individuals who do not feel rested need to look into the reason why and their sleep patterns. The dream sleep, also known as REM sleep, happens at the end of the Non-REM cycle. During the REM sleep, when dreaming is occurring, individual's are beginning to wake up. Then the process happens over and over and over during the night. The brain is a fascinating system as it is rejuvenated by dream sleep. So the sleep cycle of Non-REM and REM sleep happens over and over in 90 minutes intervals and leads to a refreshed body-brain connection. To get the maximum effects of these

cycles, it is important to sleep in a dark room, noise free because without these cycles, sleep deprivation can develop. And without the dream sleep, several things happen to the brain, including brain fog and slowing of mental clarity. This interested me because after years of sleep deprivation, I began to see the effects of deprivation and the problems it was causing me in my day-to-day activities. I had to work toward getting more adequate sleep and increased my sleep to seven hours per night. Knowing it is God's gift to me, it was important for me to deal with my sleep deprivation and apply it as experience in my coaching with clients.

#### Module Four

In Module Four, Dr. Hart talked about man was created to receive and enjoy pleasure, the role of pleasure and the opposing function called Anhedonia. There is a difference between pleasure and really being happy and the massive impact on the chemistry of the brain. Anhedonia is the inability to get pleasure out of the normal day to day activities. When an individual does not feel pleasure, it can be a symptom of a more serious mental disorder such as depression. It is so serious that the individual doesn't even take pleasure in their family and can't find pleasure in anything oftentimes turning to addictive behaviors. The pleasure system in the brain is blocked and depression occurs.

#### *What Solutions Are There For Anhedonia*

Anhedonia is the inability to get pleasure out of the normal things in life and can cause very serious mental disorders in both adults and children. Anhedonia is an epidemic in our society. Because children and adults seek pleasures all the time, it is important to reintroduce boredom into their day to day activities and lesson the excitement. Shutting off the computer and other electronics is actually an antidote for Anhedonia. Getting individuals to take quiet

walks in nature, playing board games together with family and increasing Type B Pleasure can increase the pleasure level. Jesus is a wonderful role model for us seeking the Type B Pleasure. There are so many examples in the Bible where Jesus sat quiet... “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35) and “At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.’” (Matthew 11:25-26) Not only should we encourage a Type B Pleasure style of life, but add scripture in addition to being in nature, being quiet, slow down and enjoy and appreciate the life God has given us.

### Module Five

In Module Five, Eric Scalise, PhD discussed the importance of self-care by using self-assessments to evaluate the level of stress and trauma we experience and taking care of ourselves, developing a personal stress prevention care plan. This world is so full of stress and trauma and it affects every individual in every profession, but none more than in the ministry and care-giving professions. This profession, along with law enforcement, fire fighters, nurses, and doctors all have unrealistic expectations on them as they are not allowed failure, being hurt, and sometimes being superhuman and ‘ought’ to be successful. The success is in the numbers ignoring the quality, which is not totally true. For someone in the ministry, encouraging others, imparting hope and faith, is expected, not displaying their own grief, hopelessness, or symptoms of stress. This puts a lot of pressure on individuals who take up the ministry to educate others on the hopefulness of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, the one who always has it together, the one

always encouraging others and always have the right answers to every crisis. This behavior can increase the danger of increasing our own crisis, stress, and unresolved issues by ignoring them.

### *The Consequences of Stress*

Dr. Hans Selye presented research on stress in 1936, and is considered the origin of introducing stress as a “nonspecific response to any demand put on the body.” This basically means any thing we do day to day can produce stress. Severe stress can produce psychosocial or biogenic illnesses. There is an increase of adrenaline and cortisol, one of the most powerful chemicals ever, whether man-made or natural, ever produced. An extremely high dose of adrenaline is often compared to the same effects as taking Amphetamines, otherwise known as Speed. Cortisol is what fuels the adrenaline push. Both are extremely dangerous to the health of our minds and bodies. The consequences of this type of stress can restrict blood flow to the important organs in the body, reduces the body's ability to flush out the LDL cholesterol that contributes to heart disease. It also affects the memory and causes cognitive problems. It is extremely important to bring this type of stress to a manageable level. God does not want us to be stressed to the point of dysfunctional. In scripture, John 16:33 “These things I have spoken to you, that to me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation: but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.” God wants us to have peace and has the perfect plan for a healthy body and mind, giving us a roadmap to recovery from all the world’s trials and tribulations. This, we can be sure of day to day.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 28:30)

## References

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