

Stress **R_x**

Ask Dr. Sharon

By Dr. Sharon Lamm Hartman

Don't sweat the small stuff! Dr. Sharon gives some tips on handling common stress-inducing situations.

Q: Achieving work/life balance appears to be a myth, much like the "Fountain of Youth." How does one go about creating this balance in her life?

A: As a working mother, I often feel balance seems like a myth. For years, I tried scheduling time for my self, family, work, community service and friends in my weekly calendar. I believed I had to have it all, all at once! I finally gave up when I discovered balance comes from the inside out. It is a feeling.

I encourage you to ask yourself this question: "What is most important to me right now, given my life situation?"

A client of mine received a big promotion and asked for her family's support while she focused more on work for the next three months, assuring them it did not mean she loved them any less. On the contrary, I recently felt guilty about working so much and chose to let go of some work and community projects to have more time with my 18-month-old son. We will all have different priorities at each stage in our lives.

Try choosing hourly, daily, weekly or monthly priorities. For example, if you're moving, give yourself permission to eat pizza every night and skip the gym for a week. The key is to relax your expectations and adjusting your schedule to what is most important in your present situation. Adjust until you feel happy on the inside.

Q: I was recently passed up for a promotion at work and I want to discuss the reasons why with my Director, but I fear that I will get emotional and don't want to risk showing this side at work. Any suggestions?

A. I wish I could say don't worry about it as emotions are just a part of who we are, but the typical workplace still views emotions as a weakness.

Vent your emotions before you have your conversation by writing your feelings in a journal or sharing with a trusted friend. Give yourself permission to get angry and sad. It is very normal for you to feel angry and hurt over not getting a promotion; just express your emotions before you schedule a conversation with your Director.

You'll know you've successfully vented your emotions when you're able to discuss the situation from a curious point of view without crying or gritting your teeth. When meeting with your Director, ask for feedback on what you can do to better prepare yourself to get a promotion like this in the future. If you get emotional, take a breath and say, "I'm sorry, this promotion means a lot to me." Then continue the conversation.

Q: What are the top 5 "stress" indicators for women?

A: 1. Hair roots visibly in need of a color. When stressed, women can tend to let personal maintenance go. Six months after giving birth to my son, I looked in the mirror only to see my ever-expanding hair roots and dark circles under my eyes. I had let myself go, and worse yet, I ran out of my under-eye concealer.

2. Overindulging in alcohol, chocolate or other mind-altering substances. A daily glass of red wine and a piece of dark chocolate is a lot different than eating a half a cake or drinking a bottle of wine to cover up emotions we are not expressing.

3. Mood swings or "flying off the handle." Snapping at your spouse for no apparent reason or fantasizing about pouring a hot bowl of soup on his head is a sure sign you're stressed.

4. Decreased socialization, especially with girlfriends. Socializing, venting and laughing with girlfriends is a huge stress reducer. If you detach from your girlfriends, it may mean you're stressed.

5. Muscle tightness in back, shoulders and neck. This is where women hold a lot of stress. More often than not, a good massage can alleviate this all-too-common stress symptom. ■

Dr. Sharon Lamm Hartman coaches executives, leaders and entrepreneurs as they discover balance in their lives and purpose in their work. She is the President of Inside Out Learning, Inc., and serves as adjunct faculty at Columbia University and the Center for Creative Leadership. Contact her at www.insideoutlearninginc.com.

