PURIS CONSULTING

THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON SELF CONFIDENCE AND YOUR BRAND
RESEARCH SUMMARY

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Stress is a large factor in most peoples' lives. Although average stress levels have decreased, many Americans say they struggle to achieve their healthy living goals and that their eating and sleeping are affected by stress.[1]

Stress is defined as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well being" (Lazarus &Folkman, 1984; Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2012). Stress manifests as we go through the process of encountering a stressor, judging how we can respond to such stressor, and then responding to the particular stress-inducing event (Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2012).

The stress response a person has in any particular situation is based on the level of resources they have to deal, or cope, with that particular situation (Lazarus &Folkman, 1984). It is also based on their general anxiety level or "trait anxiety", defined as how prone an individual is to see the world as worrisome and fear inducing.

Coping pertains to thoughts, feeling or behaviors (Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2012).
How a person copes with stress defines how much the stress in their lives impacts the person and thus, their interaction with others personally and professionally, thus defining how others view the person.

Self-Confidence, or the amount of value we place on ourselves, is a part of our individual self-concept and is a large part of a person's resonance with others in their sphere of influence and world. Self-confidence shapes how a person defines his/her own brand[2] and how others perceive his/her individual brand. Self-confidence is thus a coping mechanism.

Reflecting on personal values can keep neuroendocrine and psychological responses to stress at low levels (Creswell JD and colleagues, 2005). In brand development work with clients, an emphasis is placed on defining individual brand values. These individual brand values are then used to define and shape the overall brand culture of an organization.

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[1] Stress In America, Paying With Our Health, survey. Released February 4, 2015; www.stressinamerica.com.
[2] Personal Brand is defined as: a) The process of unearthing your unique and relevant characteristics and attributes; b) communicating these characteristics and attributes consistently to your audience; and c) how your audience perceives your characteristics and attributes.

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Research Query:

A) How is self-confidence a resource in dealing with stress and what is the relationship between self-confidence and stress as they impact a person's brand perception? B) How is this relationship relevant in business environments?

Hypothesis:

As stress increases, self-confidence starts to proportionally and inversely drop, thereby reducing a person's brand value to where they are no longer resonating emotionally with their audience. This lack of resonance will likely impact relationship building and trust in a business environment, which in turn likely impacts productivity.

Activities and resources that increase a person's self-confidence can also improve coping with stress, thereby directly reducing stress in proportion with the increase in self-confidence.

Control Elements:

Two main factors seem to influence a person's self-confidence: stress and a person's propensity towards general or trait anxiety. For purposes of this study, the level of general/trait anxiety was not a focal point. The focal point was stress responses derived from a) personal values and b) activities designed to directly impact self-confidence.

Results were weighted as needed for age, sex, occupation and sampling errors.

Population Studied:

Professionals (white collar, regardless of formal education), 24 to 65 years of age, female and male.

Testing:

One hundred individuals were studied. Participants volunteered with the incentive that they would get a better understanding of his/her brand resonance and impact/performance in his/her careers/jobs.

To establish a baseline, all participants:

a) were given a set of grid, simple response and multiple-response questions regarding their stress and self-confidence; and,
b) were asked to give a 5- minute speech in front of an unfamiliar audience on an unfamiliar topic, where the audience was asked to rate their perception of how "competent", "likeable" and "smart" each individual speaker was to them personally.

The groups were then split randomly in two:

Group One: Asked to: a) reflect on and list their most important values, b) asked to read two to four statements that others who knew them well had written about why they chose to associate with this Group A person, and; c) were each given one verbal compliment regarding their physical appearance and mental aptitude.

Group Two: the control group was not asked to participate in any further activity.

Both groups were then exposed to two high stress activities: a) taking a timed math test and b) again giving a 5-minute speech in front of another unfamiliar audience on another unfamiliar topic.

Both groups were then put back in front of their initial audience to rate their perception of how "competent", "likeable" and "smart" each individual was.

Results:

Group One:

- Performed the timed math test significantly better than the control group
- Their second speech was ranked differently by the audience- the audience responded that the person giving the speech was increasingly more competent/credible and thus more likeable. The individual audience member also stated that they would want to associate and engage in conversation with the Group One presenter.
- Their overall stress was reported as lower.

Extrapolating this research to corporations and employees would suggest the impact of increasing self-confidence and/or reducing stress for employees at work is critical to their success and the organization's success.

In the work environment when stress is lower than self-confidence, then the employee perceives themselves as more valuable to the organization and resulting behavior would likely include applying themselves more to their job duties, establishing and sustaining a better work relationship with colleagues and producing better and more frequent results.

In turn, other employees would likely view their colleague as more competent and likeable. Thus, they likely would associate better with such colleague to achieve more organizational goals and results, thereby directly impacting an organization's bottom line figures/revenues.