

## It Is What It Is

By Robert Hawkes, QC

It's no secret that being a lawyer is demanding. A lot of what we have to do in a day is inherently stressful. It may involve conflict. The stakes are often high and invariably important to our clients. We are usually working to a deadline. Routinely we work with incomplete or, worse, inaccurate information.

Add in who we are as lawyers and it gets worse. Getting into law school requires skills and abilities that are more often found in high achievers. Competitive, aggressive, goal-oriented and pressure driven. Many of us feel more comfortable when we're in control. The profession has a high percentage of type "A" personalities.

Put the job and the type together, and you have a recipe for stress. It seems inevitable, and to some degree it is. But life is rarely governed by absolutes. The question isn't whether the task is stressful, or whether you have character traits that predispose you to create stress for yourself. The question is: what do you do about it?

If you take nothing else from this article, take this: all stress is self-generated. All of it. Stress doesn't arise from what happens; rather we experience stress from how we perceive what happens or what we believe may happen. It is this narrative in our head that generates stress.

I've had a long life with many troubles, most of which never happened...

-- Mark Twain

Consider a simple example. Getting fired is often perceived as stressful, but if you were thinking about quitting anyway and instead you get fired and given a severance package, your perception may be quite different.

The stress is created entirely by your reaction to the event. Different thoughts about the same event lead to different stress levels. One person believes they'll never find another job. It's a disaster. High stress. The second person believes it's fate, and that they'll find an even better job. This turn of events is exciting. Low stress.

The key here is that whether the second belief system is realistic simply doesn't matter. Stress is created, or not, only by how you perceive what is occurring.

There is more advice on this topic than you could read in a lifetime - much of it good. The Power of Now, by Eckhart Tolle; The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari, by Robin Sharma; Co-Dependent No More: How To Stop Controlling Others And Start Caring For Yourself, by Melody Beattie. You could read them all, and many others. But most focus on a few universal truths.

- Live in the present; dwelling on the past, or anticipating the future, creates stress;
- Striving to control anything other than your own actions creates stress;
- Beliefs powered by "should" create stress; and, the good news,
- Your ability to change your life is far greater than you think.

It starts with this thought - "it is what it is". Accept what happens. Stop judging every occurrence in your day. That will free up energy you can use to start changing your life. Energy you can use to make each day more the way you'd like it to be.

And that's a goal worth pursuing, especially for us type A's. 🌐



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