
The Beacon

Guiding You Through the Process of Change

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For Professionals, Executives, and Others in High-Stress Jobs

Many professional, executive and managerial positions have common characteristics that often result in high levels of stress. There are generally externally imposed deadlines and demands, and multiple responsibilities that must be prioritized and juggled. Substantial amounts of time, energy and focus are usually required. People in these positions may also be likely to impose rigorous internal demands on themselves, striving to meet high standards and reach new levels of achievement. In addition, the nature of the work is often inherently stressful in the legal, medical and corporate realm. Listed below are some signs to watch for that may indicate a need for a change in your life:

- Chronic dissatisfaction with some area of your life - This is the most obvious indication that you may want to do something differently, whether it's dissatisfaction with your work or some aspect of your personal life. You may feel unhappy or unfulfilled with your job, your family, your social life, or your ability to pursue your non-work interests.
- Physical self-care – Often, taking care of yourself physically ends up low on the list of priorities. You may feel exhausted, have generally poor health, or experience physical symptoms. When neglecting or only minimally addressing your physical self becomes habitual, it is difficult, but necessary, to re-focus on your body's basic needs.
- Emotional self-care – Most people need some social time and some time alone, including time to relax, in order to feel balanced and fulfilled. In addition to large time commitments, high stress positions tend to require substantial amounts of cognitive and emotional energy and focus. You may feel like there's a blurring of work and non-work time. It is important to make space in

your day and in your head to think about other things and to enjoy (non-work-related) interpersonal interactions.

- Negative impact on relationships – Devoting much time and attention to work necessarily detracts from the time and attention that can be focused in other areas of life. At some point, this is likely to impact negatively on interpersonal relationships – with romantic partners, children, other family members or friends. In addition, the style of interactions and behaviors that are optimal at work may be inappropriate or destructive if they spill over into other settings and relationships.
- Feeling bad– At some point in their career, people in high stress positions often experience periods of feeling bad about themselves or their situation. You may feel isolated, overwhelmed or inadequate, or experience anxiety or depression. Sometimes, these feelings take the form of feeling like you're losing yourself – feeling estranged from your true essence as a person. Also, self-worth may become exclusively tied to professional accomplishment, which can make true personal satisfaction impossible.

Any of the above experiences may suggest that it's time for a change. Such a change may involve acquiring new skills for stress management, or formulating an action plan to increase feelings of empowerment and possibly alter the current situation. Change may also take the form of re-examining your belief or value system, or re-considering priorities, perhaps with particular attention to caring for yourself physically and emotionally. Finally, it may be time to focus on attending to and improving certain relationships in your life, in a manner that is balanced with your professional role. Counseling can help formulate and implement these and other changes that may improve the lives of professionals and others in high-stress jobs.

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