

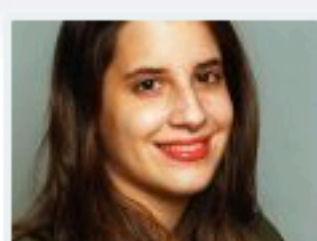
Small Business: How owners can reduce stress

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Nearly one in five small business owners work 60-plus hours a week, and 76 percent have had symptoms of work-related stress, a new study shows. Experts advise business owners to find ways to reduce that stress before it affects mental and physical health and ultimately the bottom line. (Credit: iStock)

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[bio](#)

Running a small business can be stressful, particularly with the number of hours many owners put in.

A recent survey by [The Alternative Board](#) found nearly one in five small business owners work 60-plus hours a week, and 76 percent have had symptoms of work-related stress.

Finding ways to reduce your stress load can improve your mental and physical health and ultimately your bottom line.

"The biggest struggle all of us go through is finding the right balance," says Jason Zickerman, CEO of The Alternative Board, a Colorado provider of peer advisory boards and executive business coaching for business owners. "It's at the root of what every

business owner seeks."

Achieving work-life balance is certainly possible, but "it doesn't happen by chance, it happens by choice," he notes.

Failing to find that balance and reduce stress can be detrimental to your personal and professional life, says Zickerman.

According to the survey, the symptoms entrepreneurs experience from business-related stress include: impatience, insomnia, forgetfulness and mood swings.

So how do you reduce stress?

Debra Nelson, president at NelsonQuick Group in Dallas and co-author of "Preventive Stress Management in Organizations" (American Psychological Association, \$69.95), says it starts with managing your energy.

Make it a sprint: "We need to treat our work like a sprint rather than a marathon," she says.

Rather than "go, go, go," work in a cycle of sprints and build in recovery periods throughout your day, suggests Nelson, a professor of management at Oklahoma State University. For instance, take a break during the day and go for a walk.

Second, recognize and promote eustress -- this is a positive stress, she explains. Eustress is characterized by extreme focus, engagement and losing track of time, as when athletes say "they're in the zone," says Nelson.

Outsource or delegate tasks that promote negative stress, and focus on tasks that give you a rush and promote positive eustress, she notes.

Third, be mindful and present, says Nelson. Stop multi-tasking so much and be 100 percent in the moment rather than functioning on autopilot. If you find yourself losing focus, take three deep breaths to reset, she recommends.

Also don't ignore good nutrition and health, says Tami Racaniello, president of It's Time To Get Fit in Huntington Station, a corporate wellness and nutrition consultancy.

Get moving: Get yourself moving throughout the day, Racaniello says; every hour, get up and stretch. "The key's movement, not so much exercise."

Avoid consuming too much caffeine and processed foods, she notes. Drink water and eat healthier snacks such as trail mix with ingredients including nuts and pumpkin seeds.

At least a half-hour before bed, do something that relaxes you and try unplugging from electronics, says Racaniello.

Mindy Wolfle, chief marketing officer at Armao LLP accountants in Garden City and president of Neptune Marketing, a Long Beach marketing and PR firm, makes time for crossword puzzles before bed.

"It helps me wind down," she notes, adding she also enjoys computer word games. Among her other stress relievers, Wolfle incorporates naps into her Saturdays and goes to a foot reflexology spa at least twice a month. "It's relaxing," she notes.

It can help to create a written "personal vision" for yourself, says Zickerman.

For instance, Zickerman's vision states that he'll be at 75 percent to 80 percent of his children's sports activities, and he'll rock climb at least one if not two days a month.

"It gives you a very clear understanding of what will truly make you and your family happy in the long term," he says.