

Stress Management and Relaxation: the Bigger Picture

There can be no doubting the link between stress management and relaxation. Taking time off work for recreation is essential if we're to be healthy, happy managers. The trouble is, those who are most stressed are often the ones who just can't see the wood for the trees.

When we're under severe stress it's too easy to find we've developed a **work-life imbalance**. And it can be difficult to do something about it. Especially if we lose sight of the bigger picture. Next time you feel you're tipping into imbalance, remember the bigger picture. Use the power of visualisation and story-telling to re-focus your priorities.

Here's an excellent story, packed with imagery and meaning. If you haven't read it, pay attention - it may just change your life. If you have seen it, read it again. There's nothing wrong with a little refresher! Then pass it on....



The Bigger Picture...

One morning a professor of philosophy stood in front of his class and wordlessly began to fill a very large, empty, mayonnaise jar with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

The professor picked up a box of tiny pebbles and tipped them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly allowing the pebbles to roll into the open areas between the golf balls before asking the students if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

Next the professor poured a box of sand into the jar filling up all the remaining space and once more asked his class if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous "yes." The professor then produced two glasses of wine from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, the students laughed.

"Now," said the professor, as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life.

The 'golf balls' are the important things; your family, your children, your health, your friends and your passions. In other words, all those things that if everything else was lost, and if only they remained, your life would still be full.

The 'pebbles' are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car, holidays, etc. The sand is everything else, all the small stuff.

Now if you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the 'pebbles' or the 'golf balls'.

The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are truly important to you. So pay attention to the things that are critical to



your happiness, play with your children, take care of your health, make time for your friends, and go out to dinner with your partner because there will always be time to clean the house and fix the car.

Set your priorities and take care of the 'golf balls' first, for they are the things that really matter. All the rest is just sand."

One of the students raised her hand and asked, "What does the wine represent?" The professor smiled, "I'm glad you asked. I was also showing you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of glasses of wine with a friend."

... And The Small Stuff

When things in your life seem almost too much to handle, when 24 hours in a day are not enough, remember the mayonnaise jar and the 2 glasses of wine!

Whatever your methods of stress management and relaxation, ensure you build in time for recreation. Hit golf balls. Collect pebbles. Walk along the sand. Socialise with friends. However you like to relax, make sure you do it. Never let a narrow work-focus obscure the bigger picture of a healthy, balanced life. **Remember the importance of stress management and relaxation. Life really is too short to sweat the small stuff.**

Now, try this simple stress management tool....

First, list your 5 golf balls - the most important things in your life.

Next, list your 5 pebbles - the other things that matter.

Finally, list the 5 things that cause you the most stress, but matter least.

	Golf balls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •
	Pebbles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •
	Sand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •



Now write down a specific target for each line, in each category. Make sure you list tasks for *all* of your golf balls *before* you move on to the pebbles then sand! Make your targets SMART – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bounded.

Golf ball: By the end of the week, I'll do one activity with my son. *His choice!*

Pebble: *After* I've arranged that, I'll prepare for Monday's meeting.

Sand: *After* that's done, I'll wash and polish the car.



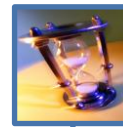
Golf Balls

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Pebbles

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Sand

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Remember: the golf balls are the most important things in your life. The pebbles are the other things that matter. The sand represents all the other stuff. And life's too short to worry about sand. Unless it's in the bunker.....!

