

Are you killing yourself ...and others ... slowly!!

By Debbie Craig

I facilitated a conversation last week with about 65 women in IT. I asked them to look at these two images and associated words and to think about the percentage of time they found themselves in each state over the last few weeks.

Reflect on your own life for a moment. What are your percentages?

*Tired Overwhelmed
Stressed Frustrated
Not in control Reacting
Resisting Not enough*



*Vitality Energy
Purpose Passion
Love Freedom
Acceptance Enough*

What is your %?

The average response for a group of that size was 75% of time on the left image and only 25% of time on the right image. For simplicity sake, let's call these two states SURVIVE state and ALIVE state. If we take these women as a sub-set of our working population, many of them in leadership roles, then we can extrapolate that many of us spend the majority of days feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, tired, out of control, resisting and that we just don't have ENOUGH – time, resources, energy, confidence, support, etc to live a happy, fulfilled, healthy and successful lives.

Everything seems to be in flux. Our companies, their strategies, our customer's needs, the technologies we use and our leaders are changing rapidly. Our jobs or economic survival are more at risk than ever, our skills becoming less and less relevant and we are faced with filtering and sifting through a torrent of information from all angles daily via our phones, mails, feeds, meetings and conversations. We check our phones on average 80-150 times per day (higher for millennials) * and spend an average of 28% of our time dealing with email*. That's 13 hours a week.

We may have every intention of starting off our day in a good space, full of ideas, energy and possibility. We may even navigate the traffic, school runs, taxis or parking issues at work without a hitch. And then suddenly we open a very disappointing mail or get criticized in a meeting or get an emergency call from our kid's school ... and our lovely state of feeling **ALIVE** and calm crashes as our brains and bodies automatically react to the perceived threat we have just received. Within 0.05 seconds our **SURVIVE** brain state kicks in, our limbic or sympathetic nervous system floods our bodies with adrenaline and cortisol in readiness for fight or flight. We believe (at a sub-conscious level) that our survival is under threat and we need to divert all of our resources (oxygen, glucose, chemicals, etc) that usually feed our thinking brain to our reacting brain and limbs ready for immediate defensive action. We therefore stop thinking clearly and rationally and are the victims of our ancient, automatic programs.

This response is mostly normal and we can recover quickly ... with practice. The problem is when we experience numerous disappointing, frustrating or negative events or unsolvable dilemmas in a day AND then keep thinking about them over and over again to analyse what we should have done or now can do to resolve them. Every time we think about a bad thing that happened, is happening or might happen (i.e. a thought tied to strong emotion), we re-trigger a rush of cortisol production to prepare us for fight, flight or freeze. (Our brains don't know the difference between an imaginary threat and a real one). **Cortisol takes 20 minutes to dissipate.** Dawson Church in his book *Mind to Matter* (2018)*, explains that chronic **high cortisol leads to widespread body damage** including high blood pressure, death of neurons in the brain's memory centres, high blood sugar, heart disease, diminished cell repair, accelerated aging, Alzheimer's disease, fatigue, obesity, diabetes, slow wound healing, reduced bone repair, fewer stem cells, reduced muscle mass, increased skin wrinkling, fat around waist and hips, osteoporosis, etc.

Other research mentioned in Ariana Huffington's book *Thrive** include the following

- "Women in stressful jobs have a nearly 40% increased risk of heart disease and a 60% greater risk of diabetes.
- "Over 30% of people in the United States and United Kingdom are not getting enough sleep" - "Sleep deprivation reduces emotional intelligence, self-regard, assertiveness, sense of independence, empathy toward others, the quality of our interpersonal relationships, positive thinking and impulse control"
- "In the United Kingdom, stress has emerged in recent years as the top cause of illness across the nation" - "60 to 90 percent of doctor visits are to treat stress related conditions"
- "19% of millennials have been diagnosed with depression compared to 12% of baby boomers and 11% of older Americans"

Not only does chronic stress and high cortisol levels have a physical, psychological and financial impact on you and your organisation, it also has an impact on others. Tara Swart in her book *Neuroscience for Leadership** explains how cortisol "leaks" out of our pores and gets picked up by others around us causing them to feel more stressed and increasing their levels of cortisol too. So not only are we slowly killing ourselves, but we may well be killing others slowly too.

Do we have a choice? Can we change?

If you stay in automatic pilot, numbed out and exhausted by the daily routines and challenges you face, you have about 15% chance of change, as over 85% of our behaviour is pre-programmed responses to certain internal and external environmental stimuli. (We know how hard it is change a habit or stick to a new Year's Resolution!). We can, however, become more aware and conscious of our automatic thoughts, feeling, physical reactions and our actions and then **CHOOSE** to shift them to ones that are more appropriate, empowering and healthy for our bodies and our minds. This takes a strong commitment and discipline to build your skill of awareness, and to consciously re-program old neural pathways that may no longer be that useful for you today.

Here are some things to reflect on to start or continue this journey to personal mastery and becoming the **CHOOSE**R of your daily reality and state rather than the **VICTIM** of your ancient automatic programs



CHOICE

"You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control your attitude toward what happens to you, and in that, you will be mastering change rather than allowing it to master you"

Brian Tracy

Start taking some time daily to observe and reflect on your thoughts, feelings and reactions throughout the day. Which were appropriate, empowering and healthy and which were not. Actively practice better, more healthy thoughts until these become the new automatic responses. Some of my favorites are:

- "I have the power to choose my response and my happiness".

- “Feel the fear and do it anyway”.
- “I have all the time and resources I need to achieve my goals.”

Write these positive thoughts or affirmations in a journal, on a screensaver or on a post-it note so you continue to reinforce these every time you see it. Practice the Robot Technique when you receive disappointing or negative news – STOP, PAUSE .. before you rush off and hit the accelerator to GO. Take the time to remind yourself that you have the power to choose a different response.



FOCUS

“What we intend to, and pay attention to, becomes our reality” John Keehoe

This statement by John Keehoe is very powerful as are his insights in his book Quantum Warrior*. We really can change our reality by what we intend to do in a day and then how we pay attention to that intention in every moment. There are so many distractions taking our attention off our intention (what we want to complete or the state we want to be in) including other people’s priorities, demands, lack of planning, etc, plus our own need for attention and FOMO (fear of missing out). Take a few breaks in the day to ask yourself the following questions to get you back on track.

- What is my intention?
- Where is my attention?
- What am I feeling right now? ALIVE or SURVIVE state?

Find time and space to do some deep important creative work without interruption or distraction. Create digital detox periods i.e. after 7pm or a weekend to declutter the disruptions and create some space to reflect and connect with others and your inner intuition or spiritual guidance. Develop a daily practice of mindfulness with quiet time, meditation or time in nature and train your brain and your heart into coherence. Dr Joe Dispenza has proven over many years of scientific research that people who spend just 10 mins, 3 times a day, over 4 days in a meditative state with elevated emotions of love, joy, or gratitude and move into a state of brain and heart coherence (order), can raise their immune systems and reduce stress hormones such as cortisol.*



PURPOSE

“The secret of happiness: Find something more important than you are and dedicate your life to it.” - Daniel C. Dennett

When you are feeling down, there is no better “pick-me-upper” than spending time doing what you love and with what or whom you care deeply about, especially with those who can really do with some support or help. Find a contribution project where you can help provide ideas, hands, resources or mentoring. Create a vision board with ideas and opportunities where you can make a meaningful difference. Develop a joint purpose for your team at work to stay focussed on something more important than the daily grind of working through tasks.



It is each of **our responsibility** as a contributing citizen and community builder to minimise the levels of stress and unnecessary emotional drama and energy drains in our own lives and in those we interact with every day, for a more conscious, healthier, more fulfilled existence and create environments in which we can all flourish and reach our potential. **CHOOSE TO BE ALIVE!**

RESOURCES

- * Deloitte's 2018 Global Mobile Consumer Survey
- * Qualtrics and Accel Millennial Study:
- * McKinsey Global Institute 2016
- * Mind to Matter, Dawson Church, 2018
- * Becoming Supernatural, Dr Joe Dispenza, 2018

- * Thrive, Ariana Huffington, 2015
- * Neuroscience for Leadership, Dr Tara Swart, 2015

Contact

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The unique stuff

Debbie is a passionate adventurer, global traveller, mountain climber, dolphin swimmer, ocean lover, philosophical dreamer, hopeless romantic, dysfunctional over-achiever, compulsive seeker & sharer, courageous difference maker, patriotic South African, author, facilitator, yoga nut, wine snob, dog lover, guardian mom, step mom, wife and friend.

Debbie has travelled to more than 60 countries, hiked to Machu Pichu, Kilimanjaro and Everest Base Camp, swum over 60 times with dolphins, explored her inner world in India over 6 trips, facilitated over 50 personal transformational workshops, facilitated business workshops with people from over 30 countries in 5 continents, written 3 books, guardian mom to 3 kids, step mom to 2 kids. She has also adventured through life's darker parts including divorce, unhealthy relationships, sequestration, retrenchment, loss of loved ones, betrayal, broken bones and inner struggles to over-come self-doubt and be her best self.

The usual stuff

Debbie has over 20 years' experience in the field of strategy, leadership development, change management, talent management, high performance teams and organisational development. She has worked and consulted at leading local and global organisations in the private and public sector throughout Southern Africa and internationally in the UK, Australia, South East Asia, South America, Mexico, China, Canada, Europe, Turkey, India and the USA. Debbie is a skilled strategist, design architect, team builder, a powerful facilitator, change agent and executive coach. Her passion is transformation and empowerment which she facilitates through individual coaching and empowerment workshops, team-development workshops, corporate training and consulting assignments and organisation wide strategic change interventions. Debbie is the founder and Managing Director of Catalyst Consulting which she has grown into a successful consulting company. She is also the founder of World Alive, a personal empowerment and transformation company. She is a registered Master HR Professional through the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP).

Debbie has published 3 books "I am Talent", "I am Alive" and "Accelerated Learning", written numerous articles, appeared on radio talk shows, presented at conferences and does public talks.

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