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This Generation's Stress and the Resilience Factor...

By Paul Shearstone

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Who among us hasn't had a conversation with a pre-baby-boomer [senior] who didn't take pleasure in pointing out that their generation was made of sturdier stuff compared to ours?

"We never suffered from depression and stress!" they say. "We accepted what was, sucked it up and soldiered on.... We never had time for `nothin' else!... You kids today aren't as tough as we were!"

Sound familiar? The important question then is, are they right?

At least on the surface, things like, stress and depression were far less prevalent `back-in-the-day' than in our time. Why? Is it because that generation suppressed their stress and tried not to let it show? Was it, like divorce, something you just didn't do back then? ...Maybe.

Did their generation have less stress to deal with than ours? The current common belief is we are the most stressed generation the world has ever produced but try convincing any WWI or WWII Vet that they don't know stress in all its ugly forms. They clearly do! Nevertheless, there are fundamental differences in the way they and we handle the problem.

For example, we know today that PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] is real and emotionally devastating. In their day, they called it `Shell Shock'... and they also called it something else - LMF – which stood for LACK of MORAL FIBER.

It's not up to me to say which generation's approach is right, only to highlight the differences.

Another point pre-Boomers like to make is, our generation doesn't know how good we have it.

Senior: "In our day, we didn't have money, we had to make do. We found ways to entertain ourselves and we were happy!"

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Whether they were happy or not is debatable. The fact that they had far less money than we, is not. So it is here, I believe, we can put this fundamental difference under the microscope to track and determine whether they may, in fact, be right and, how something as simple as money, may be at the root of this generation's moral decay and its impact on the Resilience Factor.

The Baby Boom Generation

Fact: The 1980s ushered in the greatest increase in personal wealth compared to any generation in the history of man.

Along with wealth and disposable income, came 'Choice'. Unlike the previous generation, Boomers suddenly had unlimited choices to make because they could afford to - and they did. Boats, cars, large homes and lavish lifestyles were all possible thanks to nouveau riches.

New choices also allowed attitudes and behaviors to change. Boomers no longer had to 'make do' or find 'inexpensive ways to entertain themselves'. They could afford to do whatever they wanted and when they got tired or bored of that, they could simply do something else.

If things got a little too tough, Boomers could easily abandon them and move on. Included in that were things like jobs, careers and education. The move to convenience - away from challenge or discomfort - clearly demonstrated, the paradigm shift separating the mindset between the Boomer generation and the one before. The need to 'suck it up and soldier on' was no longer necessary. Money took care of that.

Although the 1990s leveled the playing field a little, the dye was already cast for this generation's new attitude. Even corporations had changed their way of thinking. Gone were the loyalties to employees - once a given. If things were not the way, the company wanted it, change it, regardless of who or how many it affected. Loyalty was only to be given to one's self.

The Fallout:

"There is a price to be paid for everything my son." my Dad would drill into me as a lad. "The scales always balance"

It would appear the scales are indeed on the move. Statistics Canada reported that in 1999, \$12 Billion was spent on stress-related illnesses and employee absenteeism. The New York Times reported September 2004 the same problem was costing the USA \$300 Billion a year and in 2005 the UK estimated its annual costs to be in excess of 12 Billion pounds. Although anyone could argue the accuracy of these reports, what can't be argued is whatever the correct figure is... it's BIG!

The bigger question, though, is why is it happening? Why are so many people in this generation negatively affected and unable to cope with stress?

There may be two good reasons:

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1) Without question, we are the most stressed generation the world has ever seen. The need for both parents [where there are two parents] to be in the workplace to make ends meet, longer hours on the job, daunting responsibilities, unrealistic deadlines, global competition, lack of corporate loyalties, unemployment, increased drug and crime rates.... the list goes on.

The net? We live in unprecedented stressful times.

2) This generation lacks the Resilience Factor! In just over two and a half decades, the emphasis on the pursuit of what's 'pleasurable' leaves in its wake, a generation bereft of resilience—training and turpitude. Simply put, there has never been a time in human history when stress was not present. How to deal with it is, and will always be, a learned skill. Some people learn quite naturally on their own. Most of us, however, rely on others - parents in most cases - to teach it to us. Nonetheless, it has to

be learned.

Could it be that the current working single—parent phenomenon – also unprecedented - in tandem with two—income families have preoccupied the lesson—givers and the next generation is now ill equipped? Absolutely! But the problem still systemically exists in this current generation. Have we, over the last twenty—five years forgotten how to be resilient? Yes... but better put, we have learned more, how 'not' to be resilient. Let me explain.

Trained psychologists tell us that behavior of any kind [positive or negative] is learned and it is learned through repetition. The last generation focused on things like, stiff upper lip, soldier on, turning ones cheek and in Churchill's words, "Never, Never, NEVER SURRENDER!" That generation believed it, lived it and learned to be Resilient because of it.

Compare that to a generation that followed whose newfound wealth and ability to choose, allowed them to learn new ways to live, that meant Resilience training was suddenly off the radar. Add to the mix, unprecedented daily stress and responsibility, more uncertain competitive times and the picture suddenly becomes clear - we are unarmed - we lack the Resilience Factor.

This generation was told that it is okay to show one's feelings, be upset, angry or sad. I cannot argue with that logic but I can if people are not also taught proper boundaries – how to qualify, quantify and rebound to natural negative emotions. That is the other important half of the lesson. My Dad always said, "Control your Downs and your Ups!" Resilience is the ability to bounce back, to cope. It has so everything to do with learned healthy boundaries and control.

The good news is the same psychologists tell us that behavioral modification is possible and it is achievable at any age.

There are breathing techniques designed to control blood pressure, reduce stress. Behavioral Triggers are excellent ways to immediately transform one's negative thoughts and actions. Stress Minimization exercises and techniques, Music, Power—Talk, all blend together to reduce stress and bring more balance and harmony into our daily lives. Moreover, the better news is, anyone can learn these strategies and without question, they WORK!

The Bottom Line:

This generation and the one to follow can learn a lot from generations past. What they did instinctively, are the building blocks we can use on a conscious level to embolden ourselves in this new, more competitive and stressful world - saving companies and healthcare systems Money! The success of our health and happiness lies in the strength and quality of our Resilience Factor!

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Paul enlightens and challenges audiences as he informs motivates and entertains. Paul's newest Keynote or Seminar / Workshop is, "The Billion Dollar Dilemma...Conquering Stress & Life Balance"

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For more information and how to order Paul's new book, "Until You've Walked the Path" please visit

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"Every day millions of people struggle valiantly with the pain of CFIDS and Depression... the very real physical pain and the excruciating psychic pain of the soul. Paul gives both voice and face to their pain. More importantly, he gives expression to their courage, resilience, and valor. By his account of his own remarkable journey, he gives hope to the millions of others who are still on theirs". Karen Liberman Executive Director, Mood Disorders Association of Ontario

Your Emotions Can Put You at-Risk for Alzheimer's

By Susan Dunn

Your Emotions Can Put You at-Risk for Alzheimer's by Susan Dunn, MA, certified EQ Coach

Still don't believe anger kills, and stress ages you? In a recent study re: Alzheimer's disease (AD) the psychological assessment included these questions: "I am not a worrier," "I often feel tense and jittery," and "I often get angry at the way people treat me."

The study included 797 individuals with an average age of 75. Research has proven that chronic stress is associated with changes in the hippocampus (an area of the brain), as does chronic depression, and

problems with learning and memory. Researchers therefore suspected that people who frequently experience psychological distress might be at increased risk for AD. Their suspicions were confirmed.

Participants were also tested on episodic memory, as impaired episodic memory is a symptom of the disease.

According to the study, reported in PsychiatryMatters.MD, "over an average 4.9 year follow-up, 140 individuals were diagnosed with AD. In addition, those classified as being highly prone to stress (90th percentile) were shown to have twice the risk of developing the disorder as those in the lower stress category (10th percentile)."

Further, there was a greater than 10-fold increase in episodic memory decline. Episodic memory is the recall and recognition of events, where as non-episodic memory is factual memory and implicit memory (things you "just know").

"The results suggest that chronic psychological distress is a risk factor for AD and that this association probably reflects neurobiologic mechanisms other than the pathologic hallmarks of AD," said lead researcher, R.S. Wilson, in the journal Neurology.

More evidence for the need for emotional intelligence, stress management and resilience. Source Neurology 2003; 61: 1479-1485

<http://www.neurology.org/cgi/content/abstract/61/11/1479>

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