



Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

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A CONFIDENTIAL RESOURCE FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK-LIFE PROBLEMS

April is Stress Awareness Month: Solution-Focused

I recently read an ebook by Mort (Doc) Orman, M.D. that challenged conventional wisdom and myths about stress and stress management (*“Become an Expert on Stress in Ten Minutes”*). Doc defined stress as *just a word that stands for problems in our lives*. He added that whenever we say we are “suffering from stress”—we are not. We are suffering from problems in life.

Doc asked readers to replace the word “stress” with the word “problem” in our vocabulary. This simple switch of words is crucial:

- You’ll stop making the mistake of thinking STRESS is your problem.
- You’ll start focusing instead on the actual problems in your life; this will force you to define your problems more specifically.
- Instead of asking “How can I deal with my stress?” you’ll begin to ask more focused, problem-specific questions.

- Your answers to these problem-specific questions will be much more useful than asking yourself “how can I deal with my stress?”

The aim of looking at stress from a problem-solution lens is that it begs real concrete action to resolve a specific problem:

- I seem to be getting angry all the time. I wonder how I can learn to better understand and deal with my anger?
- I seem to be worrying quite a lot. I wonder how I can learn to deal with worry?
- I seem to be having recurring financial problems. I wonder what’s wrong with the way I’m thinking about or dealing with money?
- I seem to be having little success in my interpersonal relationships. I wonder what’s going on? And how can I improve my ability in this very challenging area of life?

- I’m feeling anxious all the time, my heart keeps racing, I feel sweaty and tense much of the time. How can I better understand and deal with each of these emotional and physical problems?

The benefit of asking these types of questions is they are much more focused on identifying and addressing the root problems (stressors) you are struggling with.

The Ultimate Method

1. Identify the specific problem or problems you are struggling with.
2. Determine the main causes of each specific problem you are having.
3. Deal with those causes effectively until your “stress” gets better or completely goes away.

What is key is identifying and understanding underlying causes of your problems and implementing solutions to address them.

Remember, stay solution-focused!