

Breaking the stress spiral: Act, let go, trust

Adaptive module

~20 min

Workplace stress is too often handled by telling people to relax. This module starts instead from a precise mechanism: the spiral that links perception, emotion, behavior, and feedback, and that loops back on itself until it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. It shows that opening just one of the four doors is enough to stop it, and it gives the three questions that point to the right one.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 01 Identify the four stages of the stress spiral: perception, emotion, behavior, then the result and feedback received.
- 02 Open just one of the four doors to stop the mechanism, using three questions to choose which one.
- 03 Release built-up pressure in two ways: putting the emotion into words and getting the body moving again.
- 04 Choose the right stance for the situation: act in small steps, let go, or trust others.

WHO IT'S FOR

Anyone facing stressful situations at work who wants to regain clarity and room to act.

- **Prerequisite:** none

HOW THE MODULE WORKS

Self-paced, with practice tailored to each learner.

- 1 **Self-assessment:** on 9 dimensions, to gauge current habits and guide the practice.
- 2 **Expert video:** 10 minutes, with 3 pauses for reflection.
- 3 **Practice scenarios:** the first 2 chosen from the self-assessment, then 16 optional ones. Every answer gets feedback: what it leads to, and one way to improve.
- 4 **Dated commitment:** one action to try, written by the learner or picked from the suggestions.
- 5 **Memo to download:** key takeaways, questions, commitment, personal notes and checklists.

A SAMPLE PRACTICE SCENARIO

Hugo, a writer at a university, keeps rereading the student welcome guide, approved on Monday by his manager. The printer will accept corrections until Wednesday. On this Tuesday, Hugo has already checked the phone numbers three times; the newsletter, due out on Thursday, is falling behind. What does Hugo do?

ASSESSMENT AND COMPLETION

Pass mark: 80%

The score takes into account your answers to the practice scenarios, your commitment and, where relevant, any additional learning activities. Passing requires a commitment and a score of at least 80%.

METHODS & MODELS

- Afthonios method of the stress spiral with 4 doors (perception, emotion, behavior, result), related to Lazarus & Folkman's transactional model
- Self-fulfilling prophecy (Robert K. Merton, 1948)
- Control vs letting go, inspired by the Stoic dichotomy of control (Epictetus) and Stephen Covey's Circle of Influence
- Afthonios method of 3 sorting questions (what is stressing me? how much room do I have to act? whom can I ask?)

SOURCES & REFERENCES

- Richard Lazarus & Susan Folkman, Stress, Appraisal, and Coping (1984): transactional model of stress
- Robert K. Merton, "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," The Antioch Review (1948): the self-fulfilling prophecy
- Stephen Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (1989): circle of influence
- James Gross (1998) – the processes of emotion regulation