

THE TOP **4** THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW TO TURN **STRESS** AROUND

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Conscious Calm: Keys to Freedom from Stress and Worry



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INTRODUCTION

When you're under high, chronic stress, or worrying you might be burning out, it can be hard to know where to start for real relief.

There's so much advice out there about prioritizing your many tasks, reorganizing your home, or scheduling your time hour by hour. (Not to knock any of those; they can make a difference for sure.)

But after over 20 years of working with people on turning stress and burnout around for good, plus researching and writing *Conscious Calm*, I've discovered 4 top things for stress and burnout relief. Using these, people recover and get back to calm and control faster and more consistently. The Top Four Things each have to do with a shift of focus: instead of trying to manage all the stressful stuff *out there* first, they're about first identifying and taking better charge of what you're doing on the *INSIDE*.

This small shift in focus can lead to lasting stress relief from the inside out.

The Top Four may seem simple to you, or more complicated. They might be things you've considered before, or they may be brand new to you. Either way, I invite you to not just read them, but take a few minutes to actually consider how each applies to you in your most stressful challenging situations. Being more aware of these four things in your life could well be the keys to new levels of relief, plus greater calm, happiness, effectiveness, and even inner peace.



1

TOP THING ONE: YOUR INTERNAL DOING

In any busy, full life, DOING is key. You need to be in effective action every day in big and small ways, whether at home, at work, or with friends and loved ones.

If you're like most people who are trying to get a handle on high stress or burnout, you're super busy. There's just too much to DO. And most stressed people focus on trying to get a better handle on all those tasks and obligations on the outside to feel better. It's natural.

The common mistake, though, is not paying enough attention to your INTERNAL DOING.

The reality is you're doing *internally* all day long too. You're doing thinking all the time – by some reports we think 15,000 – 45,000 thoughts every single day. You're making hundreds of decisions both small and large. You're also doing deciding about what to pay attention to inside and out, and what to ignore, whether you're aware of those decisions or not.

Then you're also doing feelings and emotions. Plus, you're also interpreting your own and others' communications in ways that are either accurate and helpful to you and the other people, or not so much. Interpretation is another kind of doing.

Most people don't even think of all these as "doing" at first. And most sure don't think about all of them as choices. (If on autopilot, they're hard to notice as choices.) Yet these and other internal behaviors are **things you DO internally** that either energize and empower you, or if on autopilot, they can run patterns that actually add *more* stress and upset to your life.

Noticing more of your INNER DOING that's going on all the time is key. Allowing your inner doing to continue on autopilot, under your own radar, can have a cost, especially when you want to get free from stress or burnout.

The truth is, we are DOING our internal experiences much more than we may realize. We're often "doing" aspects of our stress or anxiety or burnout without fully knowing it. Paying more skilled attention to your inner doing -- not just the long external To Do lists and obligations to others -- is one Top Thing to stopping negative stress, and is the road back to calm and real control.



2

TOP THING TWO: DRAINS ON YOUR ENERGY

Just keeping up with your busy life takes a lot of sustained energy and attention. That's not news to you. But the second Top Thing for turning around patterns of stress is understanding that your inner doing can either generate more energy or drain it away, causing more stress.

The mental chatter that we do all day long takes energy. Yet our inner talk tracks are often on autopilot, going on without our full knowledge. Or we might hold common assumptions, like "That's just how I am, I have trouble turning my mind off when I'm stressed."

The majority of people lack good information about how our thoughts and feelings actually work. Most haven't learned about the real costs to our energy and our quality of life caused by our inner doing on autopilot.

In part, those energy drains develop when our inner doing is driven by emotional habits and beliefs that don't match up with who we are today. They can happen when old, deeply held beliefs don't align with what we most want today when we're the best version of ourselves.

When our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are outside of our awareness, on autopilot and outdated, this can turn into the tail wagging the dog. That happens when the strongest, deepest beliefs about ourselves are loaded with old meanings. We then tend to believe our thoughts and feelings far too much, especially the negative ones. Beliefs about ourselves from long ago can run our lives, even if they aren't true at all now, and maybe never were. Beliefs about our basic worthiness, about deserving or not deserving, can influence how we treat ourselves and others, especially when we're more stressed or tired.

When we "do" a lot internally with these outdated beliefs, it creates strong emotions like anxiety or anger, which drain us. We can end up feeling insecure and weakened, not understanding why. Over time, this can become a pattern leading to burnout.

Getting a clearer sense of how we "do" emotions and beliefs is key in stopping hidden energy drains that can lead to high stress and burnout. Getting skillful with our inner doing prevents these drains, and leads to more energy and personal power.



3

TOP THING THREE: TRUE NOURISHMENT

It's common for busy people under a lot of stress to push through to keep going and make things happen. This can be a strength both at work and at home, and isn't usually a problem in the short run.

In the long run, though, when pushing through (or the variations: "sucking it up" or the chronic "I'm fine") becomes a deep habit, that can become a problem. That's when this particular habit of inner doing can create more chronic high stress and even develop into burnout.

You may need to push through instead of eating a meal every once in a while. Or you may choose junky food. Over time, that will affect your level of physical nourishment and wellbeing, which then can affect your energy levels, mood, and effectiveness.

But physical depletion is one of the easier kinds to notice. Less common is paying attention to nourishment beyond just the physical. To turn stress or burnout around, it's important to consider nourishment on *all* levels. When your mind gets depleted, or your heart or spirit are not getting the basic nourishment they need as well – that becomes a path toward burnout, which is a form of deeper, longer term depletion across many levels.

Avoiding depletion physically is important. But giving yourself nourishment on all levels is key to avoiding the kinds of depletion that can lead to chronic stress and burnout. True nourishment is finding a way to replenish yourself on multiple levels, beyond just the body.

When you let yourself get more filled up in ways that nourish you emotionally, mentally, and spiritually if that's an important part of your life – then you can more reliably recover from stress and burnout. Then you're on a path that naturally begins to include much more happiness, meaning, and fulfillment.



4

TOP THING FOUR: WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Do you know what you want?

This may sound obvious to you. If you're stressed, worried, and maybe struggling with burnout, the quick and natural response will be some version of "I just want to feel better!!" or "I just want my life back!"

Of course. That's a natural and worthy response.

But that's the big goal, and it's usually overwhelming to think about taking so much on at once. Top Thing Four is about helping you feel better by getting back to knowing what you want, starting with the small stuff.

When you're experiencing lots of stress or even burnout, you're usually involved with many kinds of demands from outside. If you're like most people, and if you're honest with yourself, a few of those demands are not what you want to be doing, at least some of the time.

And yet they may be obligations you can't shirk, or don't want to. Like family. Or like a job that you're not enjoying. Like bills. Or figuring out the next big step in your life.

Most people in chronic stress end up sacrificing in big and small ways, usually starting with their own wellbeing. Getting back to the question "What do I want?" on a regular basis, starting with smaller realms, can help make that muscle stronger again. Asking yourself about smaller things you may have given up, or denied yourself. Or smaller things you never even considered.

What do you actually want to eat for breakfast? What color do you want to be wearing today? Who do you want to have a longer conversation with today? Or not? As you answer questions like these with your truth of the moment, you can actually give yourself more of what you notice that you want, if you choose.

These smaller ways of reconnecting with what you want can help you get back to feeling more in control, more empowered. And asking yourself what you want in smaller ways builds your inner clarity to tackle the bigger questions and challenges in your life. You'll be practicing listening to yourself more carefully, trusting your own knowing. That's a big part of recovering from chronic stress or burnout faster and more reliably, and feeling more like your best self again.