

Create a “Stress Helps Me” Mindset

The belief that “stress helps me” is scientifically proven to help you improve your performance, resilience, and well-being. Yet to truly develop the belief “stress helps me” often takes more than just being told science says so. This is especially true if you have strong past memories of times stress has gotten the best of you. If you want to develop the belief “stress helps me,” you need to build it with evidence. Use the following questions and examples to help you remember past stressful experiences—and how stress helped you perform. For each question, try to find 1–2 vivid, meaningful examples. Write down your answers or find a picture or symbol that represents them so you can revisit them again to help solidify the belief that stress is helpful.

What’s a personal value that’s extremely important to you that you live out each day? How does your stress response help you live out this value?

- *Loyalty is extremely important to me. When I begin to act in a way I consider disloyal, I often feel it in my body before I even realize it in my mind. I’ll get butterflies in my stomach and feel my hands shake slightly. This helps me realize I need to change course.*

Describe a goal you accomplished that you really cherish. How did your stress response help you succeed?

- *Getting promoted was extremely important to me. My stress response motivated me to make sure I was doing everything I could to set myself up for success. It wasn’t fun, and the stress leading up to the promotion board made me prepare really hard, but it was well worth it.*

Describe the most important relationships in your life. How does your stress response help you be there for the people you care about most?

- *My children are the most important people in my life. I worry about them constantly and second-guess myself when I’m with them. But it helps me make sure I’m being the best parent I can be and doing all I can to protect them.*

Describe a stressful period of your life when you experienced significant growth. How did your stress experience help you grow?

- *My divorce was really hard, but I learned I hadn't been the person I wanted to be for a while. I had been incredibly selfish, and I took so much for granted. It was a horrible experience, but it helped me get my priorities in order and be a better parent and leader. I'm now less judgmental when other people are struggling, and I realize I have a lot to offer.*
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Describe a time when you were at your best under pressure. Describe how you focused your attention, what emotions you experienced, and what your self-talk was. What helped you perform?

- *When I was briefing a 2-star general, I was focused on making sure I was clear and concise, providing the critical information. I was a little nervous, but also serious due to the severity of the brief. My self-talk was, "This is important information and it's my duty to my country to be the one to state it." Practicing numerous times and imagining what the experience might be like helped me perform at my best.*
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Strategy moving forward

Regularly reflecting on times from the past will help you develop the belief "stress can help me." But today also offers opportunities for you see how stress can help you. Choose a couple of the questions below and reflect on them each morning to prime your stress response and help you be at your best.

- *What values do you want to live out today? How can your stress response help you?*
- *What goals do you want to accomplish today? How can your stress response help you?*
- *Who are the people you want to care for today? How can your stress response help you?*
- *What adversities might you face today? How can your stress response help you?*