

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Diana Murphy

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Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

Welcome to *Weight Loss for CEOs*. A podcast that teaches executives and leaders how to deal with the unique challenges of achieving sustainable weight loss while balancing the responsibility of a growing company, family, and their own health. Here's your host, executive coach, Diana Murphy.

Good morning, my friends. I hope you're having a great Monday already, or whatever day it might be when you open this podcast. I cannot wait to bring you this episode today and a powerful podcast series on my favorite topic; stress. Yeah, it is actually my favorite topic.

What I am going to lay out in the next few episodes is unpacking the entire topic of stress. I want to help you to understand it, unlock it, interrupt it, and show you how to take care of yourself no matter the circumstances or the pressures that you're experiencing in your job or in your life. I cannot wait.

But, before we get started today, by the time that this episode goes live, I have two beautiful new things for you. One, I relaunched my website. It just looks a little cleaned up and it has an amazing offer for you on the front page. This is a free video-series that I have had a blast creating. This is titled How to Lose Your First Five Pounds.

This is for anyone that has weight that they'd like to lose, whether it is just five pounds or 85 pounds. The beauty of this training is if you apply what I have for you in this series, of four videos with a bonus in there, that you will be losing weight in a way that creates not only the first five pounds of weight loss, but the next five and the next five and the next until you hit your natural weight.

So, today, go to my website, dianamurphycoaching.com and right on that front page you'll see me smiling at you and a click button. All you have to do is give me your email. Even if you're on the list already, this will give you an opportunity to opt-in and make sure that you get this series. Now, if you have any trouble with that, email me at diana@dianamurphycoaching.com.

And thank you, Jess Hershey, who has helped me with a new template and getting my website – which was beginning to give us a little trouble, but by going to a new website, we're in great shape. So, all you have to do is click

[Weight Loss for CEOs](#) with Diana Murphy

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

there and you'll receive the welcome video and the first step to losing your first five pounds. How would it feel to lose your first five pounds for the last time? Just think about that.

What if that's the last time you lose those pounds? That's my goal in the work that I do. So, take advantage of it and let me know what you think and what questions you have.

Alright, so let's get into stress. I would say that about 60% of my coaching conversations land on the topic of stress. Stress is the emotion, the thing that disrupts our wellness the most. It does it not only on how it really affects us with emotional eating and normal stress responses, but stress also affects us biologically in the way that our body reacts by releasing all of those fight or flight hormones.

Less stress does truly equal better health. That's why it is one of my favorite topics. We're going to go slow with this so that you can truly learn and apply these concepts as you continue the podcast series. I'm really excited about it because in my life and my clients' lives, they are beginning to see that they have more power in these stressful moments than they realized and the outcomes are absolutely amazing.

I know, as a weight coach, that my goal with clients was always to help them to stop that cycle of stress-eating and drinking. But what has been amazing over these years when we begin to self-coach in these moments of stress, as my clients learn to do that for themselves, as I've learned to do that. You can apply these tools to any strong emotion or situation, so that's what I'm offering for you today.

And I have true life examples to share with you that illustrate the benefit of managing and dialing down stress. More energy – we're just not as worn out from being stressed out. We're more creative. We have much clearer thinking. Our minds are just not distracted by all that stressful thinking. And we have more opportunity to be more curious and be in more of a solution-making mode in terms of our self-care and just anything around us,

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

because we're much more able to tap into problem-solving when we aren't stressed out.

You know, it's really about not always handling the urgent, but feeling on top of your game and really making those choices from a really good place. So that's my goal in this series, and I've got some great examples. I can't wait to share more of this with you. Alright, let's get rolling.

One of my clients is running a business where she is experiencing a lot of growth and opportunity right now. It's so exciting. But it can also be stressful, right? As she's working with me to lose weight in our coach calls, we are unpacking those stressful moments where her brain and her thoughts love to tell her that she doesn't have a bit of time to put taking care of herself first, with either a fresh meal to prepare or grocery shopping or a workout.

This is so true for most of us. When we are in stress, we just immediately go to that place where we don't have time for more. And we definitely think – and remember, that's a thought we're choosing – we definitely think in those stressful times that it's not important to put ourselves first. And that's why this entire topic is so important.

When we dug in, my client and I, in the circumstances of her growing business, I really spoke very clearly that that circumstance of her growing her business is neutral. But her thoughts are not. The thoughts that she has around it is, "I don't have enough time to handle all these opportunities. I'm going to miss an opportunity if I don't work through the night..." or a thought like this, "I cannot get all of this done."

That creates almost a purely defeated emotional state. And we define that as stress, most of us. Our circumstances in our lives are totally neutral. Let me repeat that; our circumstances in our lives are totally neutral. They are fact. The fact in this illustration is that our business is growing, and she has opportunities that she can respond to; companies calling to decide whether they want to work with her more.

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

So, our circumstances do not create stress. However, the way we think about our circumstances do. Those thoughts can create stress, or any other emotion, right? So, in fact, using the same illustration, there are also plenty of thoughts that create great emotion for her. She is excited that her business is growing. She's proud of the work that she's done. She is thrilled to be serving more people that need her services. She is proud of the opportunities that she's created.

And I want to stop you for a minute. This is that moment where we might stop and wonder – if we're looking at our thinking – we might wonder if we're a bit crazy. I know it feels a little crazy. And one moment, we're so thankful and thrilled about the way things are going in our lives, and then to move quickly into feeling totally panicked and stressed out, right? Well that's because there are a myriad of thoughts that our brain offers around any situation.

Again, the circumstance was neutral, but all her thoughts were not. Some were positive and some were negative. And so, in this episode, we're really going to focus on the stressful feelings we get from certain thoughts. Now, you might be saying, "Wait a minute, why am I upset?" like in that scenario where you're as stressed about an opportunity as you are happy about it.

And for business owners, you might be saying something like, "I worked hard for this growth. Why am I feeling so freaked out?" And I see this in clients that are growing quickly all the time. First, growth and doing things that we have never done before will naturally trigger discomfort. But what I want to point out here are circumstances trigger a large array of emotions, and none of them are good or bad. They are just emotions.

These emotions in our lives are created by different thoughts and we will always experience a mix of positive and negative emotions, through the awareness of our thinking, like I help my clients to do, like I'm helping you to do here. It's really just looking at how our circumstances trigger our thoughts and belief.

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

We can not only understand why we're feeling a certain way if we look at it, but we can also choose how we want to think in any given situation. Now, that was a little airplane view. I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself here. But bottom line, your stressful emotions come from the thoughts that are triggered by the circumstances in your life.

It happens so fast in your brain that they don't seem like separate entities, but they are. Circumstances trigger thoughts. They are separate. Circumstances are always neutral and thoughts are a reaction in our brain or a thought we think because we're triggered by a certain circumstance. It happens a million times a day in our lives.

To do this work with yourself, I find it useful to use the format that I affectionately call the thought model, and it goes, circumstances, thoughts, feelings, actions, and results. I affectionately write, very quickly in a downward column, CTFAR.

Now, remember that this form will be included in the show notes. So all you need to do is listen along. I'm going to be very clear and simple with this. But in the show notes, you'll receive how to work with the thought model as well as what I affectionately call Stress 101. And this is a guide that will guide you through the questions like we're doing in this episode.

Be sure to get those when you're done listening. They are in the show notes on my website, dianamurphycoaching.com/ceo23. But right now, I want you to think of a classic stressful situation for you. Think about what stresses you out the most. I know, so comfortable, right? But that's the coach in me. Because when we dig into these things, we really learn something.

Now, when you think about what stresses you out the most, now ask why. Asking why helps us to identify the thoughts that are creating that emotion of stress. Now, you might resist digging in here, and that's natural too. In fact, it's very human.

We think that avoiding the whole subject of what stresses us out the most will make us feel better. Now, let me repeat that; we think that avoiding the

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

subject of what stresses us out, or any emotion that causes us discomfort, we think that if we avoid it, it will make us feel better. But, when we avoid those emotions and we don't process them, and all those that come from all that stressful thinking, it can build up. In fact, my friends, this is what causes anxiety for many of us.

The bravest and most effective thing you can do is simply to take some time to journal, to discuss with a friend, or a coach why you feel stressed. In that journal or on a piece of paper, write it all down. What is every thought that causes stress? Why do you feel stressed? And write down everything you can think of.

It is the quickest way to offer yourself a dose of compassion and understanding of why you're feeling so stressed out. When you see those thoughts written out, you will know why you're so stressed. But remember, these are just thoughts. Seeing what your mind is offering and seeing what your brain is thinking is this first step. And that step alone can actually provide some relief.

For some, and it's even homework I give to clients all the time and I actually try to follow this homework more often for myself as well, it's a thought download. It's just sitting down with a piece of paper. It's really not a beautiful journal. It's just a piece of paper; a place where you want to keep track of these things. But it's writing down every thought that you can think of that's going on in your mind. Why am I feeling this way, especially if you're feeling uncomfortable, and writing everything down you can think of.

And when we get it on paper, it's like holding the thought in your hand or putting it on paper instead of actively thinking it. And this is why it feels better. Being aware and watching our thinking actually gives us some relief from thinking the thought really quickly in our mind and creating all that stress. It will literally provide some relief as you watch your thoughts instead of living them, or actively thinking them.

Now, some of those thoughts might seem a little crazy. Be sure not to over-identify with those thoughts. They are just thoughts. Think of them as

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

sentences in your brain. Your brain grabs one and practices it over and over. Remember, your brain loves to be efficient. And before you know it, it feels true. And it's so fast that you don't even realize that there are two steps to this process; circumstance that triggers the thought, and then the thought creates the emotion.

Before you know it, you are already stressed out. Do not judge your thoughts when you do this work. They are just thoughts in your mind. You can change them, you can drop them, or you can shift them anytime you want. And that is the magic to this work.

Next, when we're doing this kind of thought work or stress work, we can feel a little manic because just one situation, like the client illustration, thrilled about new opportunities in our business, freaked out about the new opportunities in our business, we might actually feel both ecstatic and dread at the same time. That's because of all of the different thoughts that are triggered by that same circumstance; different thoughts, different emotions, but same circumstance, and totally normal.

So, we have filled out the C-line, or circumstance, in this stress model. And I call all my work, when I go through thoughts with clients and with myself, I call it the thought model. But for today's purposes, I'm naming it the stress model.

So, the circumstance in this stress model is really identifying the fact that makes you feel stressed; your commute, your business, your marriage. You can even name the particular scenario, like it stresses you out when your partner yells at you or it stresses you out when you look at the financials for your business. Those are facts. No matter who looks at that situation, like looking at the financials, they would see it in the same way. That is a circumstance.

But next, I want you to jump to the feeling line. Because we are working on stress relief, we are just going to assume that the feeling is what you identify as stress. So now, we've filled out circumstance of what stresses you out – I want you to write that down – and note any other emotions that

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

might be coming up around that situation. This might give you some other insight as well. So put stress in the F-line or any other emotions that you feel around that situation.

Again, circumstances first, thought is second, and feeling-line is third. Now, this is easier to learn visually, so be sure to download this sheet in the show notes, dianamurphycoaching.com/ceo23. And I am doing live podcast trainings on Tuesdays the day after the episode, so watch out for me there on my business page at 9AM. And this might be where you can really learn to see it visually and how I work with it, but the worksheet will work for you.

Now, when I asked you why you're stressed out, that's how you fill in the T-line. Now we can jump back to the T-line; the thought. You may have done the thought load as I asked you this before, why are you stressed out? Identify the one that grabs you the most, that really triggers stress. And the absolute way to get to this thought that is creating stress for you is just to ask why.

Why, when this circumstance happens, do you feel stressed out? Just pause here. List as many answers to that question as you can like I mentioned in the thought download. I got ahead of myself a little bit there. So, this is where we are filling in the T-line. Those are the thoughts that are running around in your mind and creating the stressful emotions.

I have another illustration of how dramatic our brains can be and why, on any normal day, we experience stress. This will also be another opportunity for me to fill in a thought model for you as we go through this podcast so you can keep practicing.

I was conducting a workshop for a group of account executives, salespeople. And I asked them what stressed them out the most. And for almost every one of them, they were nodding their heads, "The end of the month." So, the end of the month is the circumstance. We put that in the C-line. It's a fact. There is a last week of every month, right, so we put that in the C-line. It's a fact.

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

I asked them then why it stressed them out so much. And these are the thoughts that came up for one of the participants. I asked, why are you so stressed out at the end of the month? She said, “Because I am afraid I will not make my numbers.” And I asked, why does that stress you out? She said, “Because I might not be able to pay my mortgage.” And then I asked, why does that stress you out? “Because if I don’t pay my mortgage, my husband is going to think I’m a loser and leave me.”

Wow, now that’s stress; feeling like the love of your life is going to leave you. And that’s what was going on in her mind unmanaged. And in almost every workshop, you know you’ve heard the example, if you’ve been listening, about how someone was so stressed out about her commute because it made her late was her thought. And when I asked her how many times she was like – twice during an entire year. But her brain was offering that this was an awful thing that she was going to be late every day. And it caused her a lot of stress. It was just the thought in her mind.

That’s the same here. This woman so triggered in her sales month because these thoughts are coming up as she gets to the end, “Oh my gosh, I might not make my numbers and then I might not be able to pay my bills, and wow, if I don’t pay my mortgage, I think my husband might think about leaving me.” And she looked at those thoughts and was like, “What, what was in there?” Yes.

Our thoughts are kind of running rampant and creating these emotions without our permission. I know this sounds really dramatic, but you can see here why, if we don’t dig in, if I don’t ask more questions and you do this to yourself, you know, that first why, write it down. Ask why three to four times and you will get the ugly thinking that’s causing that stress.

And it’s usually doomsday. Our brain is just going on without our management. Now, we almost started giggling during this session, and fortunately, don’t worry, the person I was coaching was the first to start laughing. And what was a relief to this group of salespeople is they realized why they were so stressed out at the end of the month. Their brain was

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

leading them on a path of doom and gloom and, unmanaged, that is normal.

But these patterns can be interrupted just by the awareness, like we've already done here. Now, I know – and I know this happens for my clients too – that we can almost start giggling when we start feeling doomsday at the end of the month and we go, “Oh yeah, that was that trigger that happens for me.” And we start loosening up that thought pattern by being aware of it when it happens again.

Alright, so, circumstances trigger our thoughts and our thoughts create feelings, or what I like to call a vibration in our body, an emotion. What about the rest of the model? Well, that's why I'm with you today and it's one of the reasons I work with this concept so often, because to complete the model, we're going to talk about action and results.

So again, it's CTF, which we've covered, and now action and results. Actions are anything we do as a result of the emotions we're feeling. Some feelings make us act. Some make us pullback. To fill in this line in the model, this is where we ask, what do you do? How do you react when you experience stress?

When you're feeling stressed, what do you do? This is where we can understand why we do the things we do. When we experience strong emotion, we might move quickly to move to soothe ourselves so we feel better, or we might retreat. This is a lot of times when people talk about being overwhelmed, they shut down and they don't get anything done. And we're confused why we're not doing anything when we have a big deadline, you know. That's stressing us out and we start, like, how do you react when you stress out? A lot of us shut down.

For example, when you feel a positive emotion, like feeling proud – this is one that works really well for me is – I might try to recollect what I'm proud about when I am trying to take action because it makes me naturally want to take action. Every feeling state, every emotion creates an action or an inaction. So, how do you respond? How do you react when you feel

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

stressed? What's your A-line? Make a list of as many reactions that you can think of and then get really curious. Do you love those actions? Would you love to react differently to the circumstances in your life?

This is the nugget of using mindset to take great care of ourselves. This is the key point in understanding why we have wine often during the week, or when we had no intention also of doing so. Or it might be why we work long hours instead of working out on the way home. It might feel like why we deserve a big dinner because we had such a stressful day at work.

And this is where we do the over. If we want to react differently, we will need to think differently. This is why I work with this so often with my clients, because the amount of stress that they're experiencing in their physical body is causing them to want to eat more, whether it's snacking during the afternoon or imbibing more alcohol after work. And it is easier than it looks when you're in the middle of it, right?

When you're in the middle of that moment, you're like, "No, I need a glass of wine. No, I deserve this meal." But, if you stop, even after the fact, and walk through these steps in the Stress 101 sheet with me and begin to apply the thought model, understanding what you're thinking and knowing that you can drop that deep stress reaction so that you're just not naturally always going for comfort, or what I call buffering.

But most of us, when we experience stress, go to over. These are my favorite over activities. We overwork, we overeat, we overdrink, and we over-social-media it. I know that's not a verb. But we do. When we are feeling stressful emotion, we want to get away from it. And many times, we use these activities, those are our actions that come out of that all in an effort to feel better. These are all so normal and natural human reactions. They buffer our stress. They are all the natural action or reaction to feeling those emotions.

This pattern can seem hard to break when you first look at it. And that is only because the brain works wicked fast and it loves pattern, even ones that don't serve us. I want to encourage you. Number one, awareness of

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

just asking why you're stressed and not judging any of your answers will dial down the experience and the intensity of stress.

Awareness is one of the most powerful things we can operate here. We are the only beings, human beings are the only beings that can watch what we're thinking. We can think about what we're thinking. And when you use this skill of watching what you're thinking, you can provide some relief right away.

Now, also, when practiced, the thought model, or my stress model, when you go through these questions, they will always help you see that you have an option to think differently and feel differently about any situation you face. We can practice all the yummy emotions we feel, like in that growth example and illustration I shared. When you are experiencing good and bad emotions, you can note the positive thoughts that create good emotion and choose to switch back to those anytime your brain is offering the negative one.

So, number one is awareness. Two is practicing this more and more and giving you the opportunity to think differently. Three, you are not a failure because your reactions are not what you intended. This is where we get really curious.

By using this model, by staying really curious, you can turn the thoughts around so that you can react in a new aligned way. You can understand why your brain starts talking you out of stopping at the store on the way home because you're so stressed at work and want to get to your laptop. And you can say, oh no, my brain is offering that you don't have time and you just go, I know what's going on, I'm going to do what I intended anyway. So, just by knowing what's going on, you literally can keep following through with all the actions you intend to do.

Alright, so managing forth is really cool. Managing your mind in one area, like stress, just focusing on this as a practice, will give you an opportunity to see how you can manage any response or emotion in your life. It is the essence of what the business community is calling emotional intelligence.

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

This is taking responsibility for how you react in any situation, how you show up in your work conversations, the way you work and communicate with others, or how you show up after a long workday or a work trip.

Believe me, if you start identifying why you are stressed out and get to the bottom of those thoughts, you are going to see some of these outcomes.

When we get insight on what's causing us stress in a compassionate way – remember that, don't judge your thoughts, don't judge yourself for thinking them, don't judge yourself even for the actions you take when you experience stress, "Oh, I should have stopped eating at plus-two." No, just look at it with curiosity – it is much more natural to offer that to others and not bring our crappy thinking or our stress into the situation. That's what we're calling emotional intelligence.

When we get to the bottom of what's bothering us and identify it, we don't bring and kind of almost throw up that crappy thinking or stress onto someone else or the situation. You know how it is when we snap at our loved ones or snap at a work partner that knows you well. It's like they know you're stressed out and it's okay. But wouldn't it be awesome to be onto ourselves more often and be more aligned and in control during those situations? That's where this can be so helpful.

Now, this is the reason that I say often that I am so thankful for the tools that I have learned as a coach. I mean, it has changed my life. I literally now, by taking responsibility for my stress, in my family dynamic, I really see it. I am literally showing up to situations where I am just a calmer person.

And I don't know if my family really notices, but I know that I just give myself so much more space to listen to others because I'm not so in my own junk, or whatever. I don't know if I'm explaining this clearly, but the clarity that I have had by using these tools that I am sharing with you and I have learned as a coach, they obviously contribute to my successful coaching practice, but what is even more important, they have changed my life for good.

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

You know, I thought that when I first learned to be a weight loss coach, that I would simply just use those tools to help others. But where it really benefitted is applying this thought model to all the areas of my life. And I am creating amazing results as a new business owner just four years ago, and now living a life that is more peaceful, way more productive, and definitely not one I could have ever imagined four years ago, seriously.

Most of my peers just don't see this opportunity. And I know that getting to the bottom of my stressful and ugly thinking has really cleared the way for me to be confident enough to run this business. So, are you ready to have guidance in your life, to hit your goals? Then, my friends, it is time for a consult with me.

The calendar link is available in the show notes for you. I would love to meet you. If that link is not working or you don't want to go back to the show notes, just shoot me an email. We can hop on the phone, diana@dianamurphycoaching.com. You know, a consult is just an opportunity to have someone listen to what you're thinking about your life. And you and I will know by the end of the conversation if it's right for us to work together. There is no obligation getting on these calls. It is really an insightful fun time. So my consults are really one of the best parts of my week.

Alright, so I love opening up this subject of stress. I don't want to go on much longer here. I know you've got a big day ahead. And thank you so much for being a listener, and I got a note this week from Cindy. And she was all over telling me how much she loves the podcast. And I just want to make a shout-out to her and let her know how much I appreciated her note. It just made me cry.

It was so great that she is valuing the podcast, but just took the time to say hello. And I hope you all feel comfortable doing that. Have a great day. I love you all, every one of you, and have a great day, and I'll see you all next week, where we unpack stress in a little different way. Bye.

Ep #23: Stress 101: How to Dial Down Stress

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