

Work in Progress

Published monthly by Michele Crawford

Work in Progress is an electronic newsletter intended to assist individuals seeking optimum well-being.

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Feature Article: Understanding Stress! The Physical and Emotional Components that Create Strain and Tension in our Lives. Part Four.

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1) Note from Michele

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Dear Reader

In Part One and Part Two of this series, I outlined the physical components of stress, related to our animal origins and natural fight or flight or freeze response and Part Three introduced the emotional aspects of stress.

In Part Four, I will unite the physical and emotional characteristics of stress. Utilizing a narrative style and a typical anxiety-related issue, a phobia, I hope to further explain the fundamental elements of what stress looks like. Again, a focus is placed on our beliefs being the key

factor to creating elevated negative affect and emotion (as well as behavioural consequences).

Typically, the two elements of affect and emotion are not separated. By extricating the body-felt sensations of emotion, it becomes so much easier to appreciate how to calm them in times of duress. The final edition, Part Five, will outline strategies of managing all forms of tension now that the groundwork of understanding stress has been formalized.

THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DIMENSION OF STRESS UNITED

The parking lots stories share something in common. The two men both disturbed themselves by how they interpreted the situation, **significantly elevating their stress responses**. Add to that the damage to their immune systems caused by the chemical reactions of arousal and over time, with the accumulation of many other similar situations, you have a recipe for heart disease (or stroke, or cancer, or diabetes, or Fibromyalgia, and so on).

THE STORY OF A WOMAN WITH A MOUSE PHOBIA

Let's bring everything I've mentioned together in one final story. There was a woman who had a fear of mice that was so severe; she had placed one hundred and eighteen mouse traps throughout her house. You could imagine how dangerous that could be on a dark night.

Her first memory of being frightened by mice happened when she was six years old. She had wandered into the original, yet abandoned, homestead building on the family farm. This was a place that had happy memories because her great grandmother baked cookies for her there. She had since passed away and the little girl was now forbidden to go into the old house.

Do you remember when you were young and doing something you knew you were not supposed to be doing? Your arousal is already stirred up.

This woman remembered picking something up that turned out to be full of mice, and screaming. She doesn't remember what happened next. That's due to her arousal reaction of "freeze" following her "fright" response to the sudden appearance of mice.

In adulthood, all her plans to overcome her phobic reaction to mice, by either attending a workshop, reading a book, or just determining to not be afraid, were sabotaged by one thought: "What if a mouse gets into my house?..." Immediately, the chemical changes in her body would cause her heart to race, her stomach to feel upset and her hands to shake.

To calm these sensations, she chose the **control** response (#1 **Managing Arousal Styles**, Part Two) by going to a hardware store and purchasing a mouse trap. She believed the trap would control mice and therefore, control her reactive arousal. Of course, it didn't work in the long-term and her **control** response explains why she had accumulated so many traps.

The hopelessness of this situation appeared to permeate other areas of her life and she soon resorted to the **medicate** response, (#2 **Managing Arousal Styles**, Part Two), with an anti-anxiety prescription and just put up with all their side effects. Meanwhile, she had not addressed her irrational beliefs or the unresolved trauma that had been frozen in her nervous system since she was six years old.

Unlike the zebras, that when chased by lions go into an arousal reaction, and then discharge the chemicals in order to relax again, this woman, like so many people, had remained **stuck in the arousal cycle**. Her options then became limited to the five ways of managing her arousal state.

The woman was a client of mine and her story has a happy ending. By using my 2-step formula of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (**EMDR**) and Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (**REBT**), her anxiety and phobias (and of course, the medications), were eliminated. Her confidence soared and she had a clear understanding of how to continue these strategies on her own.

The entire process took about eight sessions; with a mix of EMDR and teaching her to identify her irrational beliefs that elevated her stress levels.

A year after I closed her file, I saw her in a mall. She told me new stories about mice. With her daughter, as a celebration, she had burned all her mouse traps in the burn barrel by the original homestead building, still standing after all these years. And some months later, apparently she was at a party in a barn and a mouse

actually ran up her pant leg! Instead of freaking out, (her former reaction), she found it very amusing and even laughed as she recited the event to me.

December's issue will provide some proven stress management strategies.

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### 3) About Michele

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Michele Crawford is a therapist who assists individuals who are struggling with trauma, anxiety or depression. Her passion for her work remains embedded in being able to connect with you in your suffering, helping you find real solutions no matter how complex the issue may be.

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### 4) Counselling Services

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Are you prepared to live with more happiness, optimism, confidence, self-worth and hope? If your answer is "yes," then your next step is to contact me for a free 20-minute phone consultation. We can then discuss how I might best help you resolve your problems of Trauma, Depression and Anxiety.

The benefits of counselling with Michele include: significantly reduced stress levels, an optimistic outlook in life, increased confidence and hope.

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