

FOUR KEY REASONS

you need Stress Intelligence



Discover a new way to
develop your mind

ANCA RAMSDEN

Four key reasons you need Stress Intelligence

Discover a new way to develop your mind

by Anca Ramsden

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**Dedicated to my clients and students for exploring
new territory and making discoveries possible.**

Preface

This booklet is designed as a brief introduction to several concepts that underpin StressAce, a method to release stress, lower stress levels and build resilience. I developed StressAce on the basis of my experience in my psychology practice over a period of 30 years, especially my work in child development.

Based on rewiring the brain to use more mature and efficient pathways for processing information, StressAce is applied by psychologists as an effective technique for lowering stress. It has beneficial applications in many areas of human performance, including thinking skills, mental processes, social relationships, group psychology, emotional intelligence, stress control, resilience, mood, recovery, behavior change, learning, window of tolerance, maturation and goal directed behavior.

It heralds in a new wave in psychology, personal development through brain training, or in more technical terms, a neuro-physiological and psycho-social brain maturation approach to behavior change.

This paper explores the exciting concept of stress intelligence, which comprises of a specific set of skills that emerge from brain maturation, and the many benefits this holds for all aspects of human endeavour.

Introduction

When I started to integrate StressAce techniques into my psychology practice I was fascinated to discover that this method that I had created produced significant, measurable and sustainable positive results for my clients.

They found a new level of resilience they had never experienced before and simultaneously developed many aspects of their personality, such as leadership skills based on mature attitudes, accountability, responsibility and conflict resolution; reading skills with better comprehension; endurance, tolerance and fast adjustment and logic, analysis and organisation skills, to mention a few.

The StressAce system stems out of my work over twelve years at Child and Family Units in hospitals in South Africa where I was part of a team that used psychological and neurological child development principles. I found that this approach can yield the same results for adults as it does for children.

Through observing the positive shift my clients experience with StressAce, I have come to appreciate the extent to which stress is a hidden force with a debilitating effect on performance, often preventing us from achieving career, work, or relationship success.

Having worked with hundreds of clients with consistent results, I trained fellow psychologists who confirmed the dramatic and broad range of immediate outcomes and the ease with which these are achieved.

The take home message is, while we are in the stressed states of fight, flight or freeze, we cannot take positive action, because stress shuts down our brain's rational and creative problem-solving centres. By using the StressAce brain training system before starting a project a more successful outcome becomes possible.

Contents

Page

| | |
|---|----|
| Preface..... | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| What is this special intelligence and how can we develop it?..... | 6 |
| How does stress work? | 6 |
| We need our stress reactions for survival..... | 7 |
| Common problems we have with stress | 7 |
| Life experiences shape us..... | 8 |
| Why do we need stress intelligence? | 8 |
| Why advice is not enough..... | 8 |
| There is a simple answer to stress | 9 |
| Why stress intelligence gives you the edge | 9 |
| Can you lose stress intelligence? | 10 |
| Triple your brain power..... | 10 |
| How can you benefit from stress intelligence?..... | 11 |
| Why is stress intelligence such a valuable life skill? | 13 |

What

is this special intelligence and how can we develop it?

The pessimist complains about the wind, the optimist expects it to change, the realist adjusts the sails. William Arthur Ward

One could say life is all about risk assessment and at the back of our mind we have one burning question, 'Are things going my way?' Whilst it appears so, we are perfectly happy. When our good fortune turns, stress sets in.

Intelligent awareness of opportunity and risk is key to our survival. The most basic of living creatures need intelligence to find food and avoid being a meal to predators. At the other end on the scale of complexity and sophistication an investment broker must be able to discern between a bear and a bull market - is there an opportunity in the stock market, or is it time to sell.

Stress intelligence helps us assess our risks more accurately, be open to opportunities and act to our best advantage. This skill can save our life, make us truly happy, more lovable and smarter, help us get more done in a day, give us high energy and develop our emotional intelligence. Stress intelligence can deliver all this and more. And fortunately we can develop our stress intelligence with techniques that specifically rewire the brain to be more resilient to stress.

Seeing opportunity and risk – a balancing act

Overly cautious people are too nervous to take risks. They may be too worried about taking a mortgage to buy a home, in case they lose their job, or the price of property plummets. At the other end of the scale are the opportunistic risktakers, rashly taking out too high a mortgage, or investing all their assets in a new business. Most of us can count both conservatives and risktakers amongst our circle of friends and acquaintances.

The problem humans face is that when they err on the side of caution, they tend not to see opportunity. And when they err on the side of risk, they ignore danger signals. There is a psychological reason for this - we struggle to be aware of both positive and negative features simultaneously, which is why making a list of pros and cons is helpful when we take important decisions.

Stress intelligence helps us to be more measured and realistic in how we look at risk and opportunity - to be rational, rather than overly cautious or impulsive. When Mary started a new business, outgoings exceeded income and her anxiety skyrocketed. She lost sight of the excellent potential of her venture, and needed reassurance from her accountant and stress intelligence coaching to become more rational again.

Rational decision making is helpful - whether you are buying a car, fighting an election campaign, or putting together a business deal. Being more rational and balanced also lets us get along better with others, improves our outlook on life and toughens us up to tolerate setbacks and disappointments.

How

does stress work?

I unlock my front door and find a masked intruder in my home – incensed, I want to confront the person. But since I am a woman and this looks like a large man, I am afraid, so I make a dash for the door, I want to escape and hide. But on my way out we come face to face and there is no escape route, so I freeze. I am totally immobilized and cannot move a muscle or make a sound, it is as if I am

glued to the ground. From this moment onwards it is as if all events unfold in front of my eyes like a slow motion movie. It feels as if I am watching events from the corner of the room.....

This scenario illustrates the three reflexes we have when faced with any threat - we are biologically primed to either fight, flee or freeze. To choose one of these I must assess the risks. Often this must happen in a split second. If I think I can win, I choose to put up a fight. If it looks like the odds are against me, I get scared and flee. To help me fight or flee my brain pumps out extra adrenaline to give me strength and energy. Think of the mother who suddenly has the super human strength to lift a car off her trapped child.

If neither fight nor flight are possible, I go into freeze. In the freeze state my brain pumps out special neuro-chemicals, called opioids, that dull pain and awareness. Should I meet my demise, it won't be too painful.

We

need our stress reactions for survival

When we feel threatened we need to be able to take the best action to defend ourselves.

If we are treated badly in a relationship and our self esteem is undermined, we should be angry and protest. If I'm late for work, frustration and impatience help me hurry and get there on time. When catching a taxi in an unsafe foreign country, such as Somalia or South Africa, it is good to be cautious and selective.

The freeze response in humans is the same as the freeze response in animals. In the animal kingdom the freeze response helps the animal play dead when it is being attacked by a predator. In humans this reaction is mainly seen when we experience a trauma. Survivors are often in a daze for several days, weeks or months after the incident. This state serves a purpose, giving them some time to come to terms with their experience.

These common life experiences illustrate that we need our fight, flight and freeze survival reactions to help us cope on a practical level with day to day living, and also with critical incidents. Stress intelligence can help us use our stress reactions in a more effective way. You may ask. 'Why is this necessary, why do we need to improve our ability to react to stress?'

Common

problems we have with stress

There are some common problems humans have with stress emotions - we can over-react, be irrational, have the wrong reaction, or have too many mixed emotions.

A person who reacts with road rage instead of moderate irritability in heavy traffic is over-reacting. We can have irrational fears. Fear of public speaking is common and most people realise their fear is unnecessary and harms their performance, yet in spite of their best efforts they cannot control this emotion.

Lucy wants to ask her boss for a raise, but this involves confronting him, which could annoy him. She is mulling it over, it's an anxiety provoking exercise and she ends up doing nothing about it for months, much to the frustration of her partner, since she can hardly talk about anything else. Her problem is that she is paralysed by fear and uncertainty and lacks the confidence to take action.

So the problems we can have with our stress reactions is that they may be too strong, too weak, or not suitable to the situation. We can also be unsure which stress reaction we need, so we may cry

when we get angry. We may feel guilty about getting angry, which means we are getting stressed about getting stressed!

Life

experiences shape us

Many difficulties we can have with emotions come from how we were trained as children. In Jenny's family angry feelings were not tolerated. Now as an adult, she is anxious and shakes uncontrollably when she has to confront someone. This means she can no longer use one of her most powerful defences in a positive way.

Success and failure continue to shape us throughout life. For example, after years of writing exams at school and university and experiencing a fear of failure, we can become irrationally fearful when we must produce work. This can lead to procrastination and avoidance of some work tasks.



Why

do we need stress intelligence?

Stress intelligence gives us natural control over our stress emotions, so we are less reactive and can use our stress reactions in the most balanced, appropriate, positive and productive way. Anger, frustration, fear and guilt are essential survival tools that we need daily and if used appropriately these emotions get us the outcome we want.

A healthy dose of indignation will help me stand up for myself if I am insulted. To get my message across successfully I must be respectful, control myself and get the right words out. A tirade of rage isn't helpful. In the same vein, a little healthy anxiety and worry can help me meet a deadline and motivate me to study harder for an exam, but too much can undermine my performance.

Stress intelligence helps us use our stress emotions in a more balanced way and to our best advantage. How can we acquire this desirable skill?

Why

advice is not enough

The advice we generally get from is that we learn to control stress, or change our attitude to stress, tolerate it better. It is true that too much stress can harm our work, relationships and health and that our imagination can run away with us. We can make mountains out of molehills and our expectations can be unrealistic.

But there are two problems with this advice. It is simplistic and also very hard to implement. It is simplistic, because we do not simply wish to get rid of stress. Rather, we need to use our stress emotions like anger and fear more effectively and appropriately - just the right amount of these feelings at the right time can motivate us.

On a practical level it is simply too hard to sift through every single reaction we have every day to every event, asking ourselves, 'Am I appropriate, or not?' It is also hard to control our emotions with logic - just think of a time your partner, friend or boss said something that upset you and your mind went over the conversation a thousand times, giving you sleepless nights, - you could not get rid of the thoughts, no matter how hard you tried to distract yourself. Self control may be good advice, but it is also hard to do.

Of course we need information, education and good advice on the psychology of stress, but it has limited impact in changing how we cope with stress. For example, we can learn valuable lessons about emotional intelligence from author and scientist Daniel Coleman, but it is very difficult to acquire emotional intelligence through education. For this we need a completely different approach - one that gives our brain the maturity these skills are based on.

There

is a simple answer to stress

I have worked with clients in my clinical psychology practice for the past 30 years developing techniques that retrain the brain to deal better with stress. I found a special combination of counselling and physical exercises will rewire the brain to a more mature level - and practice shows this to be the most effective, natural, lasting and easy way to give my clients both emotional and stress intelligence. I named the technique StressAce.

StressAce gives us natural stress control. The principle is straightforward. We have a natural ability to respond with the right stress emotion to any threat, but we have this natural stress intelligence only when we have a mature brain. During childhood our nervous system is still developing and our brain is only fully wired up by 25 years of age. At this point we have stress intelligence, the full brain power to manage stress.

When adults struggle with stress emotions, such as getting very upset over minor issues, or staying upset for too long, one of the reasons can be immaturity of the nervous system. It means we still have some reactions from childhood. For most adults a few simple exercises to mature the brain will give immediate stress intelligence. After doing StressAce brain training exercises they can report right away that they no longer overreact or have inappropriate emotions.

Why

stress intelligence gives you the edge

StressAce gives us stress intelligence, i.e. natural stress control. After using the technique people notice they suddenly have a range of novel skills:

- They can respond rather than react to situations
- Are not overwhelmed by emotion
- Are measured in their responses
- Can think through their responses
- Get a better outcome in situations of conflict with others
- Have the language to express their emotions
- Can think and feel at the same time
- Have a natural sense of what is appropriate to any situation they are in
- Feel more mature, take more responsibility, are accountable and care about others
- They feel happier and more content

In a client's own words: *'In a nutshell I would say I feel a lot more content with my life. I feel happy with the person that I am and am becoming. In my day-to-day life I'm able to achieve a lot more in a less stressed way. Anxiety that I was living with has reduced. I catch myself thinking "Oh, I feel quite happy", which is unusual, but that's terrific.*

I feel I respond to situations rather than react. I tended to jump into situations. I tend now to be able to stand back most of the time and think about what I want to say, what I want to do and then respond.

Speaking of responsibility, I feel a lot more responsible for my own actions. I'm much more accepting of my actions. I would say, "Hang on a second, that's my problem, that's my fault."

I apologise when necessary. With my husband I'm happier to just say how I feel about things, rather than think, "Oh, I won't do that, because he'll be upset." I'm actually saying how I feel. And he's able to now hear what I say without getting upset about it, so our relationship has improved out of sight.' June Smith (client identity protected with pseudonym)

Can you lose stress intelligence?

Clients often ask me, 'Will my new sense of composure and wellbeing last?' Achieving stress intelligence is a sign of neurological maturity and once you have it, you keep it. But there are situations that can still affect us and cause emotional imbalance, such as when we are traumatized, experience burnout and when we age. But in each case we can very quickly re-establish stress intelligence by simply using the StressAce brain training system. The result is always a feeling of relief and natural balance, a sense of emotional control that comes easily and is effortless.

Triple your brain power

The important point is that we have stress intelligence when we have a mature brain. Even though we may physically be an adult, this does not mean that our brain has reached full maturity. StressAce brain training exercises can quickly mature an adult's brain. It is fascinating that a fully mature brain automatically produces many other forms of intelligence in addition to stress intelligence. (Refer to Jean Ayers, William Bates, Sally Goddard and Alan N Schore, Alfred Tomatis).

Nature endows us with all the skills we need to fend for ourselves and adults can accomplish almost any task they set their mind to with a combination of three powerful skills - they generally have a good mental understanding of situations, the emotional maturity to apply themselves and physical strength. Interestingly, when we develop the brain to its' most mature state with StressAce, we simultaneously develop these three skills. This is why people say they feel more mature emotionally, they can think more clearly and perform many physical tasks better after StressAce.



This is how a client describes the benefits of StressAce: *'The difference is phenomenal in terms of not one aspect, but every aspect of my life, it is easier now, I have more energy, I have more focus, I'm more conversational with other people, more willing to take on board other people's opinions, as well as express my own.*

It has been an overwhelming and exciting experience to feel my passion for life come back.

There's definitely a clarity of thought that I didn't have before. My mind is not cluttered with lots of different things, it is more focused on what's really necessary and what's really important.

I've had increased energy levels and I am consistently more energetic throughout the day. I get to sleep better. I've probably never been physically fitter in my whole life than I am now, as well as mentally, and I am very much happier.

There is more purpose in my life. It's more focused on where I want to be in five years' time, rather than where I want to be in the next five minutes. And that's very important to me to have that. There's a certain sense of freedom that's come with this. I run a lot. I feel very good about myself.'
Josh Lowe (client identity protected with pseudonym.)

How

can you benefit from stress intelligence?

What are you likely to experience when you increase your stress intelligence? You will naturally and effortlessly acquire many new abilities and your colleagues, employer and friends and family will notice and compliment you.

- **Flick the switch to happiness**

Stress intelligence is the ability to cope well with the stresses of life, but also to feel happy when there is no real stress in our life. This may sound like common sense, but sometimes we can still feel stressed long after an upsetting experience has passed and this can lead to chronic unhappiness.

We can stay in a low grade stress state and be totally unaware of it. It is as if the 'happy button' needs to be pressed and our mind needs a refresh. We could say to ourselves, 'Hey, the problem has passed, it's time to be happy again.' This kind of self talk may work, but there is no guarantee that it will, because our brain is wired for survival first of all, and only then for happiness. We can stay on the alert indefinitely though it may not be necessary to do so, because our brain is wired to do just that – make sure we survive.

StressAce helps to flick the switch back to happiness after the stress has passed. This means we can regain our zest and enthusiasm for life instead of staying stuck in a state of stress. The upside is we are also more fun to be around when we are happy, so everyone benefits.



A sign that we are stuck in a low grade stress state is when we go about our life feeling neutral rather than happy. Ask yourself, 'Am I neutral, or am I happy?' If there is no immediate or significant problem, threat or stress in your life, your natural condition should be happiness, not just being neutral.

So though this sounds like stating the obvious, feeling happy when there is no real stress in our life can be a major shift in wellbeing. Since these are all unconscious states you won't know how happy you can be till you have used StressAce.

Benefit for everyone - *We can all experience this life changing shift.*

- **Be your most confident self**

When we feel confident it feels as if we can take on the world, we can tackle almost any challenge. But conversely when we lose confidence in ourselves, responsibilities and challenges seem to be huge obstacles, and we are driven by fear and pessimism. Stress intelligence gives us an unshakeable confidence in ourselves.

Benefits people - *Who are tackling new projects and self doubters.*

- **Get over it and move on**

One of the benefits of having stress intelligence is that we recover from stressful events very rapidly and move on. This means if you have a setback you will put it behind you very swiftly and get on with the things that you need to do. This reduces the actual time you spend being upset and unhappy and it also means you get more done. You are literally speeding up and not wasting energy and time on the past – you are living in the present!

Benefits people - *Who are stuck in the past.*

- **Stay cool, calm and collected**

Stress intelligence helps us stay calm and rational in confronting situations, in emergencies, crises and when we receive bad news. Even if we do feel upset and shocked, our feelings of distress are less overwhelming and pass more quickly. This means we can take quick decisions and the right actions, helping ourselves and others.

Benefits people - *Working in emergency services.*

- **Perform under pressure**

Performing under pressure can be stressful and take its' toll on our health. Being time poor, deadlines, weighty decisions, heavy workloads, complex work, or getting on with a difficult team can all cause undue pressure. Stress intelligence helps us to be less sensitive and remain rational in such circumstances, so we can still think clearly and take the best actions.

Benefits people - *Who are parents, and those working in stressful environments, such as law and justice, medicine, mining, corporations and defence force.*

- **Use stress as your most powerful survival tool**

When we have stress intelligence we can use our stress emotions such as anger, fear, or guilt in a positive and helpful way. This means we can recognize our emotion, express and act on it in a socially acceptable way. So if I'm getting nervous, I can say to myself, 'Is there really a reason to be scared?' And I will have a very clear sense of how to feel and act.

Benefits people - *Who are sensitive to stress, also for trauma and burnout.*

- **Say the right thing - no regrets**

'If I could turn back time, I would take back the words that hurt you.' If I Could Turn Back Time, Cher. Do these words ring a bell, do you ever regret saying hurtful things to the ones you love?

Stress intelligence helps us control our emotions and be more considerate of others' feelings. It also helps us express to others how we feel in words. It helps us say the right thing first time around, so we don't have to have regrets about what we should have, or shouldn't have said or done.

Benefits people - *Dealing with conflict and difficult relationships.*

- **Stay focused on the solution and get a win-win outcome**

Stress intelligence allows us to be flexible and solve differences with others more quickly. A disagreement can be settled right away, instead of taking days, weeks or months to resolve. People report that instead of wanting to win an argument for the sake of their ego, they stay focused on a win-win outcome.

Benefits people - *In marriage, mediators and negotiators.*

- **Give more, get more**

Because stress intelligence reduces aggression and fear, it allows us to be friendlier and more caring to others, so we express and therefore receive more empathy in our relationships. This makes for happy households and work environments.



Benefits people - *In teamwork, families and those with anger and aggression.*

- **Be accountable**

Stress intelligence makes us more accountable, so we don't mind saying sorry. We take responsibility for our actions and also care strongly about others' feelings. This gives a quick resolution to conflict.

Benefits people - *In relationship conflict and those who are self centered.*

Why

is stress intelligence such a vital life skill?

Intelligence makes us adaptable - the more intelligent we are, the faster we learn and find creative solutions. Psychologists have identified many types of intelligence and our talent in these can vary: you may be a better student than a sportsman, practicality may not be your virtue, but you are very popular with friends.

Stress intelligence is your ability to manage stress well, so it doesn't interfere with your life. Some people are naturally endowed with this intelligence and nothing seems to phase them. They can say 'Stress doesn't really bother me.' When they encounter setbacks they dust themselves off and get back up again. They enjoy a challenge, stay upbeat even when the going gets tough and they persevere.

Not everyone has such an iron constitution. Some of us are more sensitive to stress. We can be tipped into a negative stress state and end up doubting ourselves, feeling frustrated, anxious and overwhelmed. These feelings affect how we do our work, relate to those around us, our health, happiness and our outlook on life. Even if we are naturally endowed with a strong nervous system we can still lose resilience after a trauma, from burnout or physical illness StressAce can quickly restore and also improve our stress intelligence. Why is this so important?

Managing stress is a priority, because its' effects can be costly. Stress is one of the causes of mental

health problems such as depression. In a Press club address Allen Fels, Dean of Australian New Zealand School of Government and Chair of the National Mental Health Commission of Australia gave the following statistics on mental health in 2012. Mental health is the third leading cause of disease in Australia, the leading disease for women, and suicide the tenth leading cause of death for men. Australian businesses lose over \$6.5bn each year by failing to provide early intervention and treatment for employees with mental health conditions. Research by the Inspire Foundation in Australia shows that mental illness in young men costs the Australian economy \$3.3 billion a year. The International Labour Organisation estimates the cost of mental ill health at 3% to 4% of gross domestic product in the European Union.

Statistics indicate that the negative impact of poor mental health on economies is an upward trend and the World Health Organisation considers depression to become one of the leading diseases by 2050.

Conclusion

We do not need to think of ourselves as being at the mercy of the stresses of life. It is important to remember that stress intelligence and other forms of intelligence can be developed. Each of us have enormous untapped personality resources - see yourself as possessing a goldmine of potential, and when you retrain your brain to operate at peak maturity you tap into it. Everyone can benefit from improving their stress intelligence, especially those sensitive to stress, after suffering a trauma, when coping with very stressful work and home environments and mental health challenges.

Stress intelligence gives us a natural resilience to stress, and helps us meet life's challenges with more effective stress reactions. A vital skill, stress intelligence supports a meaningful and fulfilling life in 4 key areas, namely optimal happiness, social relationships, work life and health.

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Would you like to develop your stress intelligence?

Take the stress intelligence test at: www.stressace.com/stress-intelligence-test/

Visit www.stressace.com to book consultations.

Buy the book '**How Your Mind Heals Itself**' at

www.stressace.com/shop/books/how-your-mind-heals-your-itself/

Become a licensed StressAce consultant visit
www.stressace.com/about/consultant-training/

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What psychologists say

With StressAce you see positive change immediately, the transformation is amazing. For depression and anxiety this is my preferred treatment method.

Parandaman Thechanamurthi, Psychologist, Singapore.

StressAce takes the hard work out of psychotherapy. My clients very quickly become positively focused and these results are consistent. I strongly recommend this training to all mental health practitioners.

Anne O’Kane, Registered Psychotherapist, Auckland, New Zealand

StressAce makes you calm and mindful, its’ very effective for anxiety. I love using this method and I love what it does for my practice.

Jackie Young, Psychotherapist / Educator, Auckland, New Zealand

It complements the talking of psychotherapy very well and I am delighted and amazed to see the deep changes in my clients.

Ruth Mather, Registered Psychotherapist, Auckland, New Zealand

StressAce gives me the missing link I have been looking for in psychology.

Helen Tsamoulos, Psychologist, Sydney, Australia

What StressAce users say

I greatly enjoyed the sessions, I sleep better and I am very interested in discharging further stress.

Psychologist

My creativity flows and I cannot be anxious now, even if I tried.

Journalist

I am calm in my relationships and productive at work.

Business coach

Based on child development psychology, StressAce is an exciting new body and mind therapy for the mind. This method has the potential to double the power of therapy. How does it work? StressAce matures the nervous system with physical and mental exercises. It develops the whole personality and enables you to improve your mental, physical and emotional skills. ‘How the mind heals itself’ guides you every step of the way in your quest for personal development.

Release stress quickly and easily

Develop natural resilience to stress

Maximise your emotional intelligence



Anca Ramsden (HED,AIT, M.A. Clin Psych) has practiced as a clinical psychologist since 1981. She developed StressAce as a tool for stress release, for building resilience to stress and for adult personality development. She has effectively helped achieving adults with emotional, behavioral, social, learning and career challenges, mind health issues, and trauma with StressAce for over twenty years. Anca is in private practice, conducts workshops and training for health professionals.

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