



Write Yourself a Reality Check >>> The Worksheet

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When too much stress is causing you to feel emotionally or physically bankrupt—“write yourself a reality check” and cash in on the remarkable health-enhancing benefits of breaking through your unrealistic expectations. When you repeatedly answer the questions on this worksheet—whenever you feel physically or emotionally stressed out—you will begin to experience the improved physical health, emotional calm and spiritual peace of mind that come from living a life dedicated to personal growth, character development and self-reflection. Congratulations on creating a “better you!”

STEP 1: The “Inner Work” (Refining Your Unrealistic Expectations)

Answering the four questions below will help you reduce your stress—and think more clearly about what’s bothering you—by giving you new insight into any unrealistic expectations that may be harming your physical health or emotional well-being. This step is about your relationship with yourself and your inner world of thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs.

◆ 1. What am I feeling now—and why?

I am feeling _____ because _____

Sample Negative Feelings: Angry Stressed Defensive Frustrated Sad Afraid Hurt Guilty
Ashamed Outraged Unloved Unappreciated Indignant Jealous Envious Mad Enraged
Abandoned Annoyed Depressed Confused Embarrassed Hopeless “Not Good Enough” Unworthy
Insecure Rejected Resentful Worried

Example 1: I am feeling hurt, angry and betrayed because someone I thought was a friend is spreading lies about me.

Example 2: I am feeling frustrated and pissed because some jerk just cut me off and almost ran into me.

Example 3: I am feeling upset and angry because my wife is overreacting and giving me a hard time for getting home late from work tonight.

Example 4: I am feeling frustrated and angry and disappointed because my wife and I just had a big blowout argument about money.

◆ **2. How do I wish things had gone?** (This identifies your expectation, your “addictive fantasy,” your unrealistic demands or your irrational beliefs.)

I wish that _____

Example 1: I wish that people were honest and truthful and that you could trust your friend. (I.e. I wish that friends didn’t spread lies about me.)

Example 2: I wish that people knew how to drive better and would not cut me off. (I.e. I wish that jerks didn’t cut me off on the road.)

Example 3: I wish that my wife was more understanding and gave me some slack and didn’t make such a big deal about it. (I.e. I wish that my wife didn’t give me such a hard time and overreact when I get home late from work.)

Example 4: I wish that my wife would have agreed to cut back her spending for a while and that we could have worked as a team to solve this problem. (I.e. I wish that my wife didn’t have a big blowout argument with me about money.)

◆ **3. If things had gone the way I wanted them to, what would I be feeling now?** (This identifies your “positive intention”—which are the good internal feelings you want to experience in life. Though you can’t control what other people do to you, you can control what feelings you hold onto when bad things happen to you.)

If things had gone the way I wanted, I would now be feeling _____

Sample Good Feelings: Loved Appreciated Cared for Wanted Desired Energized Respected
Admired Good Understood Happy Joyous Relieved Satisfied Content Calm Connected
Compassionate Grateful Optimistic Peaceful

Example 1: If my friend was not telling lies about me, I would feel connected, appreciated and supported.

Example 1b: If friends were trustworthy and honest, I would feel happy, appreciated and supported.

Example 2: If that jerk hadn’t cut me off on the road, I would feel peaceful, calm and happy.

Example 2b: If that jerk knew how to drive better, I would feel peaceful and calm right now.

Example 3a: If my wife did not overreact when I got home late, I would feel loved, supported and appreciated.

Example 3b: If my wife was more understanding and forgiving, I would feel loved, supported and appreciated.

Example 4a: If my wife had not fought with me about our need to cut back our spending right now, I would feel supported, loved and cared for and appreciated for addressing this problem before we got into trouble with it.

Example 4b: If my wife was more of a team player and willing to work with me on a budget, I would feel supported, loved, cared for and appreciated.

◆ **4. Is there a way I can (internally) feel that way now, even though (externally) things didn't turn out the way I hoped they would?** Write down ways in which you can give yourself the inner feelings you desire (your answer to question #3 above) even when the outer world doesn't give you what you want.

Can I give myself _____ (the inner feelings from question #3 above) _____ even though _____

Example 1: Can I give myself appreciation, support and connectedness even though my friend betrayed me?

Example 2: Can I give myself calmness, happiness and peacefulness even though that jerk just cut me off?

Example 3: Can I give myself love, support and appreciation even though my wife is upset with me?

Example 4: Can I give myself support, love, care and appreciation even though my wife and I had a big argument about money and she is not willing to cut back her spending right now.

Notice that if you take the negation of the second part of the statement above and you add a "should" to it, that becomes your unrealistic expectation or irrational belief. For example, "my friend betrayed me" becomes "my friend should not betray me." You may not think of this as irrational or unreasonable—and from a values standpoint, it is not and in fact most of us would agree that friends should not betray us, and if they do, we don't want them as friends. What makes it irrational, is that—in reality—friends do betray friends all the time. That—of course—doesn't make it right and it's perfectly reasonable to choose never to be friends with that person again, but it is—in some sense—an unrealistic expectation or irrational belief that you will never be betrayed and if you are, you should not let it destroy your emotional well-being or your physical health. That's the whole purpose of writing yourself a reality check—it allows you to address your unrealistic expectations head on in so doing—to stop giving away your physical well-being and inner peace to people that don't deserve it. The friend who betrayed you already hurt you badly, don't let them take away your health and happiness too. In essence, this whole process is designed to help you acknowledge and then release the painful, difficult feelings that occur when reality doesn't meet your expectations—and then by taking action in Step 2 below, to work on improving the things you can improve both in yourself (your inner world: Step 1) and in your relationships (your outer world: Step2). So now, let's move on to Step 2.

The same is true of drivers—if you take the negation of the second part of the statement and add a “should” to it, that becomes, “jerks should not cut you off.” Now that’s an unrealistic expectation! Why, because jerks do cut people off all the time. And if you hold on to the irrational belief that they shouldn’t do it, you will give away your inner peace and inner tranquility every time someone cuts in front of you, when they shouldn’t have! This is a sure way to drive yourself crazy—while the actual crazy driver goes merrily on his way! Don’t give up your peace so quickly, it’s important to a life well-lived. Wayne Dyer taught early on, “Don’t get upset at people who cut you off. Why? They’re “cutter offers”—that’s what they do!!!

It’s important to ask, how can I give myself love, support and appreciation? How can I give myself these feelings—don’t they come from other people? Yes we need to feel loved and supported and appreciated by our friends and family but they can’t always give us those things when we need them. So a big part of growing up emotionally and spiritually is being able to support ourselves and give those things to ourselves or get them from our relationship with God or a higher power. It doesn’t mean we should stop trying to get them from our loved ones, but we must also be able to give them to ourselves. When we can do that, we also build our ability to give those beautifully healing emotions to others as well—and that helps everyone involved. Barbara DeAngelis used to teach “I feel the love inside of me, I see the love inside of you.” What does this mean? When we can tap into our own self-love and essential worthiness, it is easier to see those qualities in others and easier to give those gifts to others in need, because you now have an endless supply coming from your own internal fullness, i.e. you are filled up and have plenty to give to others—so this becomes a powerful exercise in personal growth, interpersonal growth and improving the world.

Step 1 is designed to help you acknowledge your stressful, painful and difficult emotions and then release them and stop dwelling on them when possible by recognizing that many of them come from your unrealistic expectations rather than the stressful event itself. Step 2 is then designed to help you put your energy not into dwelling on the negative, but rather into focusing on the positive changes and improvements you can make by taking positive action to improve your relationships, friendships and interactions with the world at large. (Not every situation requires both steps. Since you have no relationship with the guy who cut you off, you can’t really take the three action steps in step 2, you just have to process your own emotions.)

STEP 2:

The “Outer Work”

(Taking your new insights out into the world by taking positive steps to make things better.)

Once you have completed your “inner work” (by answering the four questions above) you must now complete your “outer work” by taking your new insights and refined expectations to the other people involved (i.e. a partner, co-worker, friend, etc.) in order to grow. Most all of our significant stresses in life occur in relationship to others—and these three action steps represent the “outer work” of relationship rather than the “inner work” of refining our unrealistic expectations.

◆ 1. Ask for what you want.

(Write down what you want to ask your friend, partner, boss or other involved persons for—in terms of making the situation better or improving the relationship or event that is causing you stress. Asking for what you want is a critical step in your personal growth.)

What I want from you is _____

Example 1: **What I want from you is** to tell me why you lied about me. What I want from you is to never have contact with me again. What I want from you is an apology for the hurt and pain you caused me. (There are many possibilities, but you need to choose what works for you.)

Example 2: **What I want from you is** to take a driver's ed course and learn how to be a good driver! (Obviously unless you know the guy who cut you off, there's nothing to do in this step because you have no existing relationship with this jerk who cut you off. You just have to work on step 1 and let go of the anger and frustration and not let it get the best of you.)

Example 3: **What I want from you is** a little more understanding and patience and appreciation for how hard I work and that if I'm late sometimes, it's not fair of you to make a big deal about it. I know I should have called and I take responsibility for that, but I screwed up and said I'm sorry, so why can't you just leave it at that. What I want from you is to let me know you love me before you let me know how upset you are with me. (Some of these things may be irrational or unreasonable and based on our own fears, inadequacies and hurts in life, however, it is fair game to ask kindly for them. But equally important is step #2 below, where you realize that though you may ask for these things, it is also fair game for your partner or the other person to tell you "no" and to let you know they are not willing or not able to give you those things. This is where you have to learn how to accept what you get!

Example 4: **What I want from you is** for you to think about what I said and be willing to sit with me and address this issue again in hopes of finding some compromises we can both make before we hit a financial crisis. What I want from you is to know that you are willing to try and find a solution. What I want from you is to be more understanding that this is not easy for me either, but we have to face the reality that we are headed for financial trouble. What I want from you is some appreciation that I am trying to do the responsible thing here and that I don't like it any more than you do. What I want from you is for you to realize that I'm not going to force you or demand that you cooperate but let you know that if we don't come to some agreement, we will reach a time when things will be much worse than they are now.

◆ 2. Accept what you get.

(Write down the things you must accept about the situation that are upsetting you or that you can't change right now. Learning to accept the things we cannot change is a vital component of wisdom and serenity—so don't try to force or cajole other people into accepting what you want.)

I accept that _____

Example 1: I accept that you may never tell me the truth about why you lied. I accept the fact that our friendship is over and I may never be able to trust you again. (In this case of betrayal from a friend, it's reasonable to ask for an explanation, but since you can't trust this person, you may have to accept that you will never get the truth out of them.)

Example 3: I accept that my wife cannot give me those things. When she gets upset, she needs loved and soothed and can't give it to me at the same time. I accept that that is reasonable for now, even though I wish she could give me those things, so now I must move on to step #3 below.

Example 4: I accept that my wife is upset and angry and wishes that we made more money than we do. I accept that my wife is not ready to address things yet, she is too emotionally upset right now. I accept that my wife is angry with me that I had a part in letting things get to this point. (If I were not to accept these things, I would be tempted to yell at her and get angry that she is not cooperating and completely ignore her feelings and start trying to force her to comply or agree with me and that would only lead to an escalation of the conflict rather than move us closer to a solution.)

◆ 3. Work on the difference.

(Write down the steps you can take to work on improving the relationship or the situation. Also write down the steps you can take to improve your own character (by building inner strength, wisdom, patience, compassion, hope, resilience, etc.) so that you can better handle the situation. This step can take hours, days or even a lifetime to work on.)

I want (need) to work on _____

Example 1: I need to work on improving my ability to pick better friends. I saw some signs in this person who betrayed me that I should have paid attention to.

Example 3: I need to keep working on getting more support from my wife regarding our financial situation. I want to work on not getting so defensive about things. I want to work on improving my ability to communicate better with my wife.

Example 4: I need to work on forgiving myself for partially getting us into this financial mess. I need to work on appreciating how hurt my wife is and how scared she feels right now. I need to work on being more assertive in setting a budget and sticking to it. I need to work on appreciating all the areas of our relationship we do agree on and be grateful for how wonderful our life together is in other areas. I need to work on helping her see that this is really the right thing to do and in the end—even though it will take some cutting back for a while—we will be much better off in a few years. I need to work on finding another temporary job where I can make some more money to help us through this crunch time.

Two Foundational Principles of Stress Mastery

- 1) Stress = The Gap Between Your Expectations And Reality
- 2) Stress is rarely—if ever—caused solely by external events or difficult people, but rather by our thoughts (expectations) about those events or people.



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