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Introduction

We live in a remarkably fast paced world. There is no denying it. Modern technology allows us to communicate with each other instantaneously. We can access nearly any book, publication or piece of music or art any time we want with just a push of a button. We can be anywhere in the world in just a matter of hours. We are entertained and informed at a level that would have been inconceivable only ten or twenty years ago. In some ways, we are very lucky, privileged even. However, all this luck and privilege comes with a price.

The technologies that make our lives better, fuller and richer also come with a down side. They also make us more available. We are all now capable of nearly constant personal and professional interaction. The questions of whether we desire these interactions or whether they are good for us, physically and mentally, are moot. Whether we like it or not, we are “always on”. This level of availability makes more and more demands on our time. In short, for many of us, there is always more and more to do with less and less time to do it in.

This dynamic of “get ‘er done” results in an almost unending feeling of pressure. We begin our days under the gun, spend all our time trying to play catch-up and go to bed at night worrying about the next day’s agenda. Because we feel we must keep up, our lives become a blur of tension as we balance our abilities and our availability against an overloaded and bloated schedule of expectations and demands. Each of us is a victim of this vicious cycle in which we are expected to perform at the highest level. Unfortunately, the pressure of these expectations can drain all the enjoyment from life, damage our overall health and, ultimately cause us not to be able to perform to the best of our abilities.

This book is about pressure. Together, we will learn how to control and deal with the pressures we all face in our day to day lives. We will start by looking directly at what pressure is and how pressure differs from stress. We will then look at what causes pressure and how pressure can arise from even the most mundane of activities. Finally, we will look in depth at how to deal with pressure. We will learn effective strategies and methods that reduce and eliminate the negative effects of pressure. These strategies and methods can be employed by nearly everyone, no matter where they are, to ensure that they maintain the control over their lives necessary to perform at their very highest levels.

In the end, pressure is unavoidable. The dynamics of our modern lives practically guarantee that pressure will be encountered by all of us, in one form or another and one time or another. The good news is that, with the proper training, pressure can be managed. There is no need to live a life of never ending demands that saps all enjoyment. There is no need to live in the pressure cooker when a calmer, more peaceful existence is available. So, without further ado, let’s get started.

What Is Pressure?

In the physical world, pressure is defined as an expression of force exerted on the surface of an object. One object comes in contact with another object and the variables of each object determine the force of that contact. So, a feather coming in contact with a block of concrete exhibits a different force than a sledge hammer coming into contact with that same block of concrete. The difference between the forces involved in each contact is pressure. Differing amounts of pressure yield different results.

It turns out that psychological pressure is, in many ways, no different than physical pressure. A person comes in contact with a situation and the variables involved, in regard to the person and the situation, determine the amount of psychological pressure that is produced. So, it can be said the pressure is variable depending on the situation involved.

The problem is that psychological pressure has the potential to create damage, just as physical pressure can create damage if the forces involved are great enough. What is more, even small amounts of repetitive pressure, over time, are enough to create greater and greater amounts of damage. Just as water can erode the largest rock, pressure can erode what we hold dearest if it exists long enough and strong enough.

So, the question remains, what exactly is pressure? Well, for a start all of us are intimately familiar with pressure. We've all been there. It might be that we have an interview for an important job, a job that would give us the ability to make our dreams come true. It might be that we have to give an important presentation or speech, one that can make or break our professional reputation. It might be that we have to physically perform – the kind of performance an athlete or musician would face just before going onto the field or the stage. No matter what the situation, pressure arises when any one of us has to deliver the goods, performance-wise, or suffer the consequences.

Pressure isn't always associated with professional situations, far from it. Pressure is alive and well when it comes to academic pursuits and personal relationships too. If you ever had to take a big exam, you've felt palpable pressure. Likewise, if you've ever gone through a rocky patch in a personal relationship, you've also felt the pressure inherent with that particular situation. However, academic and relationship pressures have one thing in common with professional pressure situations – they too arise because of a need to produce positive results right here and right now. So, one definition of pressure could be the physical and psychological reactions brought about by a situation where immediate results are required. If those results are not obtained, then failure and shame will follow.

It's this fear of failure that's key to understanding pressure. This fear of not performing up to par produces a distinct sense of dread. This dread has a lot of different names. Performers talk about butterflies in the stomach. Some other people talk about "flop sweat". No matter what you call it, this feeling is unpleasant. Human beings are genetically programmed to avoid unpleasant feelings. Therefore, when pressure produces its trademark feeling of dread, most people will do anything to make that dread go away. It is this attempt to flee the unpleasantness that makes pressure so troublesome when it comes to performance.

You see, when we try and avoid the sense of dread created by performance pressure we also tend to perform at levels lower than we are capable of. You can characterize this behavior as a kind of flinch. When something is about to strike your face, what do you do? You instinctively flinch and try to avoid the contact. The same phenomenon occurs when the pressure to perform brings about a feeling of dread and imminent failure. Just at the moment when you need to be operating at your highest levels, the fear of failure makes you flinch. In other words, instead of being able to give your all when you need it most, the fear of failure brought about by a pressure situation can all but guarantee that you actually do the opposite. So what can be done? You're always going to have to confront pressure prone situations. By way of an answer, let's take a closer look at the nature of pressure.

The Force of Pressure

Pressure is a powerful force. When you take a look at the effects of pressure, you might be forced to conclude that it very well might be one of the most powerful impetus for negative behavior that human being can encounter. Why is this so?

Well, to begin with the inability to deal with pressure is the primary cause of personal and professional failure. You read that right. It's a simple truth that failing to understand and deal with the effects of pressure is what causes people to fail. If you feel pressure and you don't recognize it and deal with it appropriately you very likely fail to reach your goals. The thing is that pressure is so invasive and extensive, given our modern lifestyles, that most people accept that a state of near constant pressure is the norm. This acceptance of pressure as a normal part of life brings out what might be pressure's most insidious effect – people begin to believe that they perform better when under pressure. This is an absolute lie.

We're all familiar with the story. It's the bottom of ninth inning in, let's say, the seventh game of the World Series. There's a man on first and your team is down by one run. Up to the plate steps the power hitter on your team. He leads the team in hits and has a batting average well over .300. He also leads the team in home runs. He steps into the batter's box and coolly sizes up the opposing pitcher, a star reliever who throws nothing but heat. The pitcher looks to the catcher and rejects the called for pitch. For a moment, the pitcher and the batter stare at each other, suspended in the moment. Then the pitcher winds up and releases the pitch. The batter swings and the stadium echoes with the crack of the bat coming into contact with the ball. It's a long, low fly ball whose parabola is aimed directly at the warning track in left field and beyond. The left fielder runs backward into the warning tracks, slamming his back against the outfield wall as he makes a leap for the ball. The ball sails over his glove and into the stands three rows up. It's a game winning home run. The crowd erupts, as the hometown hero makes his way around the bases. As he comes to home plate, he is engulfed by his jubilant teammates. Our clutch hitter has come through and has won the game despite the odds against him. The story of this moment will live on for generations.

It's a great story, and the times that it has actually happened remain sharp and clear in our collective memories. It doesn't matter the sport. It could just as easily have been a Hail Mary pass in the last second of the fourth quarter of a playoff game, an overtime goal in the finals of the World Cup or a buzzer beating jump shot in the NBA finals. The point is that these triumphant moments remain etched into our consciousness. They inform how we operate in the world when it comes to our own personal bottom of the ninth situations. Unfortunately, the way these moments influence us is fundamentally false. For, you see, they are based upon a lie.

In reality, people do not defeat pressure. They do not rise to a difficult occasion and emerge victorious. In fact, the idea that certain people actually perform better under pressure is a myth. No one, from the supposed hometown hero down to the common fan, operates better when under pressure. We simply like to believe that we do because we the memories of game winning goals or runs influence us so deeply and strongly. The reality is, in fact, very different.

Instead of bringing out our best, pressure actually brings out our worst. When confronted by pressure, we are much more likely to fall back onto rigid, linear and non-creative thinking. We are much more likely to become impulsive, making decisions randomly, without a great deal of rational thought. At the same time, we look to take safe routes and defer to tradition and consensus. In short, just when we need to be our most creative and flexible, we become dull, ignore innovation and take the easy way out. When we worry about failure, we revert to behaviors that promise safety and relief.

Statistics bear this out. Longitudinal studies have looked at how batters in major league baseball have performed in post-season games compared to regular season games. The results have been startling. Not only do batters perform more poorly in post-season play when the statistics for multiple seasons are taken into account, they have an almost infinitesimal chance of creating game winning plays on a regular basis. In other words, on any given night in post-season play a player has a reasonable chance of getting a game winning hit. However, this chance is always less than that which occurs during a regular season game and is never, ever repeatable. The bottom line is that the myth of the clutch hitter is just that – a myth.

The problem is that the myth of the clutch hitter exerts an almost irresistible attractive force. This attraction makes people believe that they are somewhat superhuman. It causes them to believe that they can walk through the fire, persevere and win in the end. Otherwise normal people can come to believe that they have an innate talent that allows them to grab victory from the jaws of defeat. Unfortunately, they are dead wrong. Just like hitters in baseball, they have a nearly zero chance of coming up with a game winning solution with moments to spare. In nearly every case, the belief in better performance under pressure only produces one thing – failure.

The only sure way to effectively deal with pressure is to recognize your own fallibility and try to deal with the effect of pressure, which perversely, is usually a fear of failure. Successful people do not believe that they are clutch hitters. They understand the pressure they are under, as well as their own failings. They take steps to stay on course despite the pressure and, as a result, they regularly do their best.

In the end, pressure is unavoidable. It is a part of each of our lives and is caused by the incessant tempo of modern life. Some people foolishly embrace pressure, wrongfully believing that they perform better when the heat is on. Inevitably, these people fail, time and time again. Successful people, on the other hand, understand that while pressure is a part of life, it can be dealt with in a manner that minimizes its negative effects. This allows these people to perform optimally.

Takeaways for This Section

- Psychological pressure is a powerful force with power to cause great damage if left unchecked;
- Pressure arises when a person has to perform a task at a certain level of competence or face negative consequences;
- Pressure has the ability to negatively affect all areas of a person's life – professional, personal and academic;
- The fear of failure, brought about by performance pressure, is strong enough to cause a person to operate at less than optimum levels;
- Failing to understand and deal with the effects of pressure is what causes people to fail;
- The myth of the “clutch hitter” who performs better under pressure is just that – a myth;
- Pressure does not make a person perform better – pressure makes a person perform worse;
- People who successfully deal with pressure understand this and employ coping strategies that mitigate the negative effects that pressure causes.

The Cause and Effect of Pressure

The cause and effect of pressure is an interesting subject simply because, like most things, the cause of pressure and its attendant effects are interrelated. As we discussed in the previous section, pressure occurs when an individual encounters a situation where they must perform at their highest level or face the consequences of failing to perform at that level. As we also previously discussed, a pressure situation invariably results in lower than normal levels of personal performance, unless steps are taken to recognize and mitigate the effects of the pressure.

This brings up an interesting point that we haven't discussed. Some people feel that pressure brings out the best in them. They feel that they do their best work when under the gun. The thing is, however, that no one can ever do better than their very best. It is a fact that pressure almost guarantees a subpar performance. Therefore, in a pressure filled situation, all you can ever hope to achieve is your best. People who think that perform well under pressure are fooling themselves into thinking that they are able to rise to the occasion and deliver a performance that is better than their best. Let's look at an example.

Tom has been asked at the last minute to put together a solution for an important client. He has been told by his supervisor that coming up with a successful solution that the client will like and adopt is extremely important in retaining this client's future business. Tom is a rising star in his field and within his company. He has the expertise necessary to come up with an acceptable solution. In addition, he has been given access to reports and resource documents previously prepared by others within the organization who have looked at this particular problem from several different angles. Among these resource documents is one prepared by a colleague of Tom's named Fred and one prepared by a manager of Tom's named Steve

Fred is a junior member of the Tom's firm, having only worked there for two years. However, his approach to the client's problem has yielded an elegant, if unorthodox solution. Steve, on the other hand, is a senior member of Tom's firm and has worked there for decades. He hasn't had much contact with this particular client prior to the current issue. His approach to the problem is a pedestrian, by the numbers approach that isn't particularly novel and hasn't been particularly effective with other client's in the past.

Tom clearly understands that he has been given sole responsibility to retain this client's business for the firm, business that results in over seven figures of revenue each year. As he begins to sift through the resource documents as the deadline approaches, a curious thing begins to happen.

Tom initially sees the value in Fred's approach. He recognizes that Fred's solution, while somewhat unorthodox, has a great potential to solve the client's problem. Yet, Tom also is aware that the clock is ticking in regard to the deadline for making a decision. He doesn't have the time to fully investigate every aspect of Fred's solution. His instinct and training tell him that Fred has very likely found the answer, but all the weight of making a decision in the time available is in his shoulders.

Tom finds himself more and more attracted to Steve's approach. He understands that Steve's solution is old hat and that it probably won't work for the client in question. Yet, Steve has based his solution on some tried and true information in Tom's industry. Steve's solution, while trite, has the benefit of being traditional and accepted. With the deadline looming, Tom rejects Fred's approach and decides to go with Steve's solution. Of course, Steve's solution doesn't really work under these particular circumstances and, ultimately, the client takes their business elsewhere. Tom is deemed responsible for the loss of this business and his career at the company is impacted accordingly.

So what happened here? Why did Tom reject the solution that he instinctively knew had a high probability of succeeding in favor of one that he knew would fail? The answer is performance paradox.

Performance paradox refers to the phenomenon that occurs when otherwise rational individuals under pressure reject positive information in favor of familiar, yet negative information. It appears that people under pressure almost universally begin to move away from their skill sets and knowledge bases into areas of distrust and self-doubt. Pressure, rather than making people more creative, tends to make them less creative. They begin to dismiss knowledge in favor of rigid thinking. They begin to dismiss insights in favor of generic solutions. Even when they aren't in contact with other people, they develop a "group think" mentality that shuts out creativity in favor of mediocre solutions.

Pressure doesn't only have this effect in the professional arena. It is extremely prevalent in academic circles as well. For example, did you know that academic competition actually gives rise to a greater incidence of cheating? It's true. We always think of people who cheat on a test as people who aren't prepared to take that test or people who aren't academically qualified to perform well on the test in question. In reality, the opposite is true. Under academic pressure, it is the most qualified, the most prepared of students who are more likely to try and gain an advantage through cheating. Even though these students possessed more than sufficient knowledge to score well on the exam, they still succumbed to the temptation cheat, even when they knew that cheating had the potential to end their academic careers.

Again, the answer to this paradox lies in the insidious ability of pressure to cloud our judgment, get us to second guess ourselves and look for the easy solution. We fear failure so much that we take make decisions designed to make us fail. "Performance Paradox" is indeed an apt name for this phenomenon.

The solution to the Performance Paradox is to recognize it for what it is. This is done by recognizing where the pressure that gives rise to the Paradox comes from. The pressure that gives rise to all this seemingly crazy behavior has one source – technology.

Technology gives us a plethora of benefits. At this same time, it brings its own set of problems to the table. Take connectivity for example. While traditional connectivity is good, technology accelerates the process. It allows all of us to be in constant contact, all the time. Traditionally, you stayed in touch with friends and family either through face time or long distance communications – letters and phone calls. You let them know how you are and what's been going on in your life and vice versa. Everybody was happy because time and distance made a buffer that necessarily kept us at arm's length. We had time to digest the news that our family and friends brought us and, more importantly, we had sufficient time to miss them and look forward to our next meeting or communication.

Technology has eliminated that buffer. Now, we can be in contact on a daily, hourly or, God forbid, a minute by minute basis. This type of 24/7 communication keeps us on a never ending informational treadmill – a treadmill that keeps getting faster and faster. A friend or colleague sends you a text message that you don't see or don't have time to answer right now. Ten or fifteen minutes later you get another text from that same friend or colleague asking if something is wrong. Because you didn't answer right away, the subsequent text makes you feel that you've done something wrong – that you're falling behind in the informational race. You start to feel that you're not getting enough done. You're falling behind, missing out on important communications. Your personal pressure begins to increase.

This increase in pressure however, is not benign. The pressure begins to exert a negative toll on your communication skills. Instead of being open, you begin to be closed. Instead of listening, you begin to ignore. Instead of being empathetic, you begin to be judgmental. The bottom line is that the pressure to keep up begins to take its toll. Instead of considering where the communication is coming from you simply react to the communication in a selfish and self-centered way.

The take away here is that pressure makes us more self-centered. We want to be excellent. We think we can pile more on our plates. In reality, pressure reveals the exact size of our plates. It shows us there isn't any more room. It makes us less than excellent. It fools us into thinking that we are able to bit off more than we can chew.

The main effect of pressure is that it alters how we behave. We won't be aware of this alteration in the heat of the moment. Yet, it's there nonetheless. If we don't take the steps to recognize and mitigate the negative effects, pressure will destroy everything we have built and will effectively eliminate all of our positive actions that bring us closer to those things we genuinely care about.

Takeaways for This Section

- Some people feel that they perform better when under pressure;
- However, this is a falsehood;
- Operating under pressure almost always guarantees a subpar performance;
- This happens because of a phenomenon known as "Performance Paradox";
- With performance paradox, individuals under pressure reject positive information in favor of familiar, yet negative information;
- This results in clouded judgment and indecision which causes an individual to turn to easy solutions;
- The end result is that fear of failure causes the individual to make choices which practically guarantee failure.

Dealing with Pressure

Now that we have an understanding of pressure, as well as its causes and effects, it's time to turn our attention to perhaps the most important part of this book – dealing with pressure. In this section, we're going to take a close look at specific tactics and strategies that can help you both prepare for a pressure filled situation and deal with mounting pressure when you find yourself under the gun. Remember, successful people are successful because they effectively deal with pressure. These tips and suggestions help them accomplish just that, and they will help you too.

Learn to Love Life

Pressure is a part of life. There is really no realistic way to avoid being in a pressure situation. Therefore, one of the most direct and easiest ways to deflect the negative effects of pressure is to accept that being alive involves a certain amount of pressure. If you accept your life, both the good and the bad aspects, then the parts of your life that are enjoyable begin to over shadow the parts of your life that are less enjoyable. Through this process pressure filled situations can come to be seen as challenges, as opposed to obstacles. In other words, when you learn to love life, you learn to love the pressures that life brings as well.

If at First You Don't Succeed...

What do you do if you don't succeed? We all know the answer – try, try again. Sure we've heard this one before, but it is still rock solid advice. When you are in a pressure situation the primary goal is to relieve some of the pressure so that you can give an optimal performance. One of the easiest ways to do this is to realize that you have more than one shot at success. Even if you don't reach your goal this time, you are going to have plenty of chances to get where you want to go. All you have to do is breathe deeply, relax and give it your best shot this time around. The realization that you have multiple opportunities takes the edge off of your pressure. As a result, you feel better and perform better.

Turn a Mountain into a Molehill

Anticipation can be a terrible thing, especially if what you're anticipating is a pressure filled event. You lie away at night thinking about possible outcomes. Your mind drifts to the event, and your role within it, every time you are not preoccupied. The problem is the most of the outcomes you imagine are negative and revolve around failure. In addition, the more you anticipate the event, both the negativity of the outcomes and your certainty that they will occur increases. The end result is that when it comes to perform, your anticipation has virtually guaranteed that the pressure you face is seemingly insurmountable. When you counteract negative anticipation with positive anticipation you avoid this result. Shrinking the magnitude of the event also shrinks the pressure, leaving you free to concentrate on making sure you succeed.

Concentrate on Your Goals

Pressure can be extremely distracting, especially when it occurs during a performance event. Think back to the last time this happened to you. What was your experience? It's very likely that your nerves and fear of failure began to distract you from the very reason that you were at the event in the first place. Once you became distracted you began to lose your mental focus. At that point, it was probably very hard to regain your composure and perform at your optimum level. This is why it is critically important that you concentrate on your goals during a pressure event. When you feel the pressure building you need to remember the reasons why you are involved in the event and what you hope to accomplish. When you keep your eyes on the prize, so to speak, you lower the level of pressure you are experiencing. This, in turn, lets you do the best job that you can under the circumstances.

Expect the Unexpected

We've all heard of the aphorism commonly known as Murphy's Law. Murphy's Law states that if anything can go wrong, it will go wrong. This is a very old concept, probably as old as mankind itself. People have been dealing with the vagaries of nature and the universe since we first stood upright. That's why you need to be prepared for the worst when it comes to a performance situation. You can practice and mentally prepare yourself for a particular event, but when push comes to shove and something unexpected happens, what will you do? A way to prepare for the unimaginable is to, well, imagine it happening. Ask yourself what is the absolutely worst thing that could happen while the spotlight is on you at the event and then prepare a contingency should that thing occur. It doesn't matter if that thing is equipment failure, illness or a natural disaster. The point is that when you expect the unexpected, you remain poised, calm and on top of your game no matter what.

Be Your Own Best Friend

We already know two immutable things about pressure. First, pressure is unavoidable and, second, pressure is corrosive to high level performance. So, when it comes to your own pressure situations, why would you make things any worse by adding negativity to the obstacles that you already face? When faced with pressure, many people make the mistake of remembering times in the past when they dropped the ball in one way or another. This tendency is understandable when you consider that the feelings of dread that occurred during those previous pressure filled situations mimic the dread that is currently being experienced. The way to counter this tendency is by being your own best friend. Instead of remembering prior failures concentrate on the times you were successful. If you take the time to like yourself you will also be taking important steps that will reduce pressure and let you perform at your best.

See Your Success

Let's say you have an important meeting scheduled for the coming week. A lot is riding on the outcome of the meeting. You have the potential to land a new client that could be worth a lot of money to your bottom line. As the day for this meeting approaches you begin to feel the familiar pressure to perform. You have to close this deal and sign the client. You cannot afford to fail. It is precisely at this moment that you need to begin to visualize your success. You need to take a moment to sit or stand in a quiet place where you can gather your thoughts and concentrate. Begin by walking through every step that the meeting will take, as well as your role in each step. Make every detail as real as possible. See yourself convincing the client that there can be no other possible choice but signing on with you. Once you have made the initial visualization, repeat the process several times each day. On the day of the meeting make sure that you go through your visualization once more right before the meeting is about to start. The process of visualization will not only help to keep negative pressure at bay, it will also empower you to succeed once the actual pressure event begins.

Be Positive

Let's face it, everything about pressure is essentially negative. If this wasn't the case, you probably wouldn't need to be reading a book on dealing with pressure and we wouldn't have needed to write one. Because pressure is negative, it is imperative that you do everything within your power to remain positive when faced with pressure. Studies have shown that people who are more likely to survive disasters are not the ones in the best shape or the ones with the most survival experience. Instead, survivors tend to be the individuals who remain the most positive when faced with adversity. Surviving a pressure filled situation has a lot in common with surviving a life or death situation. In both, there is a lot riding on the line. While the typical pressure event usually won't result in death if you fail, the negative consequences are great. Therefore, you need to battle against both the negativity inherent in the situation and your own internal tendency to go negative when confronted with pressure. Staying positive can help you achieve both these objectives which, in turn, will help you to perform your best when you need it the most.

Live in the Moment

Pressure has a tendency to make us lose focus. Because the effects of pressure are physically and mentally unpleasant, we want to run away from them. This occurs mostly because of something called the “fight or flee” mechanism. When faced with danger, we are programmed to do one of two things – fight the danger or flee from the danger. The way pressure makes us feel mimics the way we would feel when faced with a life threatening situation. Therefore, one of the reactions we have is to want to run away. It is this instinct to flee that can cause us to lose focus and concentration just when we need it most. When this happens in a pressure situation you can find yourself faltering and making simple mistakes just when you need to stay on point the most. The solution to this problem is to remain focused on the task at hand. This involves living fully in the moment, enjoying the challenge that the pressure situation brings. In other words, instead of trying to flee from the situation, confront it head on and fight. Remember that the instinct to fight a danger is just as strong as the instinct to run away. So get in these and start swinging!

Take Control

There are a lot of variables that can occur in any pressure filled event. You might be a part of a team, working together to reach a goal. You might be interviewing for a job. You might be involved in competitive sports, up against other athletes. No matter the situation or event, one thing you can count on is that there are going to be things occurring that you have absolutely no control over. That’s why it’s important to take charge of the things you can control. For example, your performance is one thing that you have total control over. Concentrate on doing your very best. Don’t waste energy by focusing on a teammate’s performance or, worse yet, worrying about an interviewer’s or client’s reaction to your presentation. When you take control of those things that you actually can control you will find that you’ll stop wasting time worrying about things that probably really don’t matter to your overall success.

Takeaways for This Section

- Successful people are successful because they effectively deal with pressure using specific pressure reducing techniques and strategies;
- These techniques and strategies include;
 - Learning to love life, including the pressures that it brings;
 - Realizing that there is more than one opportunity to be successful;
 - Minimizing the importance of a task or event;
 - Staying focused on a goal or result;
 - Preparing for the unexpected;
 - Cultivating a strong sense of self-worth;
 - Utilizing visualization to maximize the chances for success;
 - Staying positive in the face of negativity;
 - Living in the moment instead of fleeing from it; and
 - Taking control of the things that can be controlled.

Conclusion

So that's it. You now know enough about pressure, its causes and effects and the ways to minimize those causes and effects so that you can begin to effectively manage the specific pressures in your own life. Remember, pressure is a pervasive part of our modern technological culture. You can't run away from pressure, but you can take proactive measures to make sure that when you are confronted by a pressure filled situation you will be able to perform your best. Here's to your continued success!

Appendix A: Checklist

What Is Pressure?

- ✓ Psychological pressure is a powerful force with power to cause great damage if left unchecked
- ✓ Pressure arises when a person has to perform a task at a certain level of competence or face negative consequences
- ✓ Pressure has the ability to negatively affect all areas of a person's life – professional, personal and academic
- ✓ The fear of failure, brought about by performance pressure, is strong enough to cause a person to operate at less than optimum levels
- ✓ Failing to understand and deal with the effects of pressure is what causes people to fail
- ✓ The myth of the “clutch hitter” who performs better under pressure is just that – a myth
- ✓ Pressure does not make a person perform better – pressure makes a person perform worse
- ✓ People who successfully deal with pressure understand this and employ coping strategies that mitigate the negative effects that pressure causes

The Cause and Effect of Pressure

- ✓ Some people feel that they perform better when under pressure
- ✓ However, this is a falsehood
- ✓ Operating under pressure almost always guarantees a subpar performance
- ✓ This happens because of a phenomenon known as “Performance Paradox”
- ✓ With performance paradox, individuals under pressure reject positive information in favor of familiar, yet negative information
- ✓ This results in clouded judgment and indecision which causes an individual to turn to easy solutions
- ✓ The end result is that fear of failure causes the individual to make choices which practically guarantee failure

Dealing with Pressure

- ✓ Successful people are successful because they effectively deal with pressure using specific pressure reducing techniques and strategies
- ✓ These techniques and strategies include:
 - o Learning to love life, including the pressures that it brings
 - o Realizing that there is more than one opportunity to be successful
 - o Minimizing the importance of a task or event
 - o Staying focused on a goal or result
 - o Preparing for the unexpected
 - o Cultivating a strong sense of self-worth
 - o Utilizing visualization to maximize the chances for success
 - o Staying positive in the face of negativity
 - o Living in the moment instead of fleeing from it
 - o Taking control of the things that can be controlled

Thank You

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