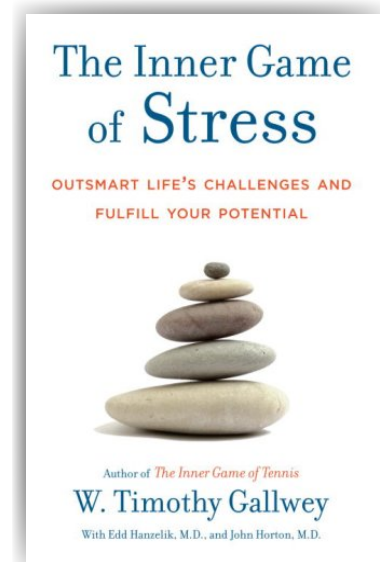


The Inner Game of Stress

Outsmart Life's Challenges and Fulfill Your Potential

W. Timothy Gallwey with Edd Hanzelik, MD,
and John Horton, MD

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KEY CONCEPTS

- *Acknowledge the negative effects of stress.* The belief that stress improves performance is a common misconception. The reality is that stress does nothing for people except cause them serious health problems.
- *Maintain a balance between the two selves.* Every person has a *Self 1* that is responsible for judging and worrying and a *Self 2* that is responsible for the actual execution of tasks. People must not allow the *Self 1* to overwhelm them with negative thoughts, but instead let their *Self 2* shine through.
- *Identify the voice of the stress maker.* A *stress maker* is the fear, doubt, or any other way a person personally experiences stress. Some stress makers undermine confidence, while others cause catastrophic thoughts. The effects of the stress maker can be curbed when a person recognizes that its voice does not speak for him or her.
- *Opt for inner contentment.* When people try to please others, personal discontent and stress begin to fester. To achieve a state of peace, people must focus instead on self-actualization.
- *Set aside time to gear down.* People need to make time to relax and reflect by engaging in activities that best suit their needs; otherwise they will suffer from the physical effects of stress.
- *Embrace the three principles of learning.* To manage stress, people must make changes in their lives. They must cultivate a sense of awareness about their situations, make choices based on their inherent desires, and trust their inner resources.
- *Cultivate and protect inner stability.* Those with inner stability, which can be created when people tap into inner resources like compassion, creativity, and intuition, are less vulnerable to stress. People can protect

their sense of stability by constructing a personal shield of inner resources, replacing bad habits with positive ones, and by learning how to say “no” to others’ stressful requests.

- *Take ownership of life.* People must take charge and become the CEOs of their own lives to regain personal responsibility and independence.
- *Use the Inner Game tools as needed.* To combat the many stressful situations of life, people must employ the Inner Game tools to regain a sense of control, adopt a positive attitude, and redefine negative issues in a positive light.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Stress wreaks havoc on people’s lives and health. In **The Inner Game of Stress**, authors W. Timothy Gallwey, Edd Hanzelik, MD, and John Horton, MD, demonstrate how people can manage stress by accessing their inner resources to build a foundation of resilience and stability. The stronger their cores of stability, the less likely people are to be affected by chronic stressors. The authors offer valuable insight into the causes of stress and its dangerous effects and provide exercises and tools to help manage it.

PART ONE: THE GAME OF STRESS

Who Needs Stress?

While stress is a common experience among most people, it should never be considered “normal.” Contrary to popular belief, stress does not contribute to high achievements or superior performances. Instead, the feeling of stress indicates that a body and mind are not balanced. Such an imbalance does not only take a serious toll on a person’s health, it also makes it nearly impossible to thinking clearly.

Stress manifests itself in different ways. To understand how to eliminate stress, people must first determine how stressed they truly are by taking their *stress temperatures*, using the following steps:

- Pick a number that describes the current level of stress on a scale from 1 to 10.
- List all the stressors that are contributing to this feeling, ranking each individually on a scale from 1 to 10. For example, having a fight with a family member may be a 5 whereas not being able to pay bills might rank as a 9.
- Describe the physical, emotional, and mental symptoms these stressors are causing, which can include anything from headaches to anger to the inability to concentrate.
- After reflecting on the answers, pick the temperature on the stress thermometer that best describes the current feeling of stress. This temperature can range in increments from 98.6°F (37°C), when people feel relaxed and productive, to the toxic level of 104.0°F (40.0°C), which indicates that stress has severely affected a person’s health and mental well-being to a point requiring medication.

Our Two Selves

People have two selves that, when not balanced, can cause a great deal of stress. *Self 1* is responsible for instructing, judging, and worrying, while *Self 2* is responsible for doing. When people allow their *Self 1* to dominate their thoughts, they end up suppressing their *Self 2* as well as its resources. In fact, the more engaged the worrisome *Self 1* is during a task, the worse a person tends to perform. This is because *Self 1* is responsible for a cycle of

Playing the Inner Game is about building a core of stability that allows you to perform at the top of your game while avoiding the consequences of chronic stress.

reactions known as the *uh-oh experience*. During an uh-oh experience, people face something they perceive to be threatening, like a difficult task. Next, Self 1 triggers the stress system, which in turn causes them to freeze, avoid the task altogether, or engage in fighting behaviors. By distorting the perception of a threat, Self 1 ultimately distorts the response.

To establish a peaceful coexistence between the two selves, people must determine who their real selves are under the many layers of judgment and fear that the Self 1 has created. This process involves letting go of the Self 1 habits and thoughts and identifying the qualities of Self 2 instead. Self 2 qualities are inner abilities that are found in children, admirable when seen in others, and qualities that people like to see in themselves. Examples of Self 2 qualities include courage and strength as well as the core abilities to learn, understand, and find clarity.

Meet Your Stress Maker

Because of its ability to paralyze people, Self 1 is also known as the *stress maker*. The simple objective of the Inner Game is to evade the stress maker so that a person's Self 2 can shine through. In order to accomplish this, people must first determine which of the following manifestations of the stress maker they experience:

- People have amazing inner abilities that are natural and productive. But they don't always have access to them when Self 1 is dominant.**

 - *Identity thief*: Speaks with authority about a person's worth by making declarations like, "I am an idiot..., I am a failure..., No one likes me..."
 - *Catastrophic fears*: Obsesses about the worst possible outcomes. It feeds on the pains of people's pasts to inflate their fears, paralyzing their common sense and critical thinking as a result.
 - *Negativity*: Facilitates melodrama by transforming a single thought like, "That person does not like me," into a surge of negative emotions including sadness, anger, and fear.
- *Self-attack*: Keeps people in a state of self-doubt by questioning their actions, insisting on how bad they are, and judging them ruthlessly.
- *False expectations*: Takes a concept like "Happiness is getting married, having kids, buying a house, and getting a good job" and insists that people live their lives according to it. It tells people what they should be before reminding them of what they do not have.

In order for people to take back control from their stress makers, they must recognize that the stress-maker voice does not speak for them. The more people learn to differentiate that voice from their own, the more natural and prepared they will feel in the face of their stressors.

An Alternative to Fight-Flight-Freeze

The human stress system is an adaptation from an earlier stage of evolution that once informed people's hunter-gatherer ancestors of danger by releasing a burst of adrenaline. While this physiological response used to save people from predators, today the chronic release of hormones from the hypothalamus, pituitary, and adrenal glands can cause serious health problems.

Beyond harming their health, stressful events often prevent people from thinking clearly and taking appropriate action. Airline pilots are able to make complex decisions in the face of intense danger by utilizing the skill of *deliberate calm*. In order for people to achieve deliberate calm, they must practice tapping into their conscious thought processes in the face of fear, just as pilots do in flight simulators. Additionally, people can learn to take conscious action when stressed by identifying what their typical stressors and stress responses are. Most people experience the instinctual stress responses of fight, flight, or freeze. Next, people must develop alternative, positive responses that can be quickly implemented during future encounters with their stressors.

While psychological stress often stems from skewed perceptions that induce fear, it is important to recognize that stress also comes from the human need for self-actualization. Ultimately, there are three dynamic relationships that can cause stress:

1. Relationship with others.
2. Relationship with society.
3. Relationship with oneself.

Too few people realize that the relationship they have with themselves is the key to regulating their stress systems, and it is the area in which they have the most control. To improve their relationship with themselves and subsequently reduce their level of stress, people must replace the futile process of trying to please others with the pursuit of their own inner contentment.

Gearing Up and Gearing Down

American culture dictates that people should push themselves past their limits. Consequently, many people spend their days *gearing up* and not enough time *gearing down*, or decompressing. Unfortunately, people forgo decompression and utilize their personal time to get work done instead. Although personal time may initially seem expendable, it is essential to maintain.

When we're overstressed, we're like the dry sponge that has too little liquid yet is still being squeezed. Unable to accommodate, we begin to tear.

When people do not make time for the rest, relaxation, recreation, and reflection (the *Four R's*), their emotional and physical health begins to suffer. To prevent poor time management from contributing to their stress, people must write down their preferred methods for each of the Four R's as well as the amount of time they typically designate for each. If there is any noticeable insufficiency in one particular area, corrective action must be taken.

PART TWO: OUTSMARTING STRESS

The Inner Game Learning Code: Act

Too many people allow themselves to be victims of their circumstances. They forget that, as humans, they have *consciousness*—a tool that allows them to stop and reflect on a situation before choosing a better way. To use consciousness to create positive change in their lives, people must employ three principles of learning:

1. *Awareness*: It is only when people increase their awareness of a situation that it becomes possible to change it. People must always try to focus their awareness on the *critical variables* of a situation—elements that are both susceptible to change and essential to the achievement of a desired outcome. The critical variables of driving, for example, include speed and lane position. While some critical variables are external, many are internal, including attitude, hopefulness, and intention. Focusing on critical variables provides people with important information about how to move toward their goals.
2. *Choice*: Awareness is a choice. Too often, people go through their days unaware of the choices they are making and end up feeling stressed and unstable. To combat this, people must learn to exercise their ability to make *conscious choices*, which should always be informed by people's inherent desires and never made for convenience's sake or to please others.
3. *Trust*: Trust facilitates a person's movement toward a desired outcome. People must trust in their own abilities, which is the same as trusting the Self 2. When people trust that they possess the necessary resources to conquer stress, their trust becomes the foundation of their stability.

Tree of Stability

Stability is inner resilience. Like a palm tree on the beach, stability has deep, secure roots and a flexible trunk that can withstand storms without snapping in two. To help people gauge their current levels of stability and determine areas that need to be strengthened, the authors suggest a *Tree of Stability* exercise. The exercise helps people identify their roots of stability as well as any stressors that threaten the strength of the tree. In some cases, an aspect of life can be both a root and a source of stress.

Ultimately, people must ground their stability in *inner resources*. While other external sources of stability are circumstantial and vulnerable to change, inner resources are the timeless qualities everyone is born with. In order for people to tap into these innate abilities, they must first determine which inner resources have the most personal value to them. Inner resources can include everything from joy, humor, compassion, creativity, intuition, hope, courage, love, and learning. By adding their selection of inner resources as roots to their Tree of Stability, people become stronger and more stable.

Build a Personal Shield

One of the most effective ways for people to protect their stability is by building a *personal shield*. This is accomplished by imagining a stressful situation currently being faced and then selecting four or five inner resources as protection from the stressor. As time goes on and stressors change, people can change their personal shields and the inner resources that constitute them.

Additionally, people can protect their stability by changing their bad habits. First, a person must try to understand why a bad habit exists before developing a good habit to replace it. For example, some people may smoke when they are feeling overwhelmed and need to take a step back from a situation. To quit smoking, they must develop different habits that allow them to take the same step back. In addition to creating new habits, people can also protect their stability by learning how to say “no” to stressful requests made by others.

Taking ownership of your life means being truly independent—thinking for yourself, living with no strings attached, and being able to have rich relationships without losing yourself.

Be the CEO of Your Life

People who are in charge of themselves do not operate to please others. They sit firmly in the driver’s seat of their own lives, which is the key to building enduring stability. This sense of self-ownership can be fostered by thinking of life as a company of which the individual is the CEO. As CEOs, people have the authority to change anything they do not like about their companies.

CEOs also get to decide on the people they want to sell shares to, which in this particular context is the act of relinquishing pieces of self-ownership to others. Often, people will sell their company shares to others in exchange for love or approval. However, people must remember that they never have to sell their shares if they do not want to, and they can always achieve stability

by buying their shares back. Ultimately, self-ownership requires people to ensure that they are living by ideologies that are aligned to their feelings and values.

PART THREE: THE INNER GAME TOOLBOX

Inner Game Tool #1: Stop

Stress has momentum; the stress from one negative event often ricochets into the next. A fight with one’s spouse, for example, can lead to a bad day at work. To stop the negative momentum of stress or to prevent a stressful event altogether, the authors recommend people use the *STOP* tool. To implement the *STOP* tool, people must:

- **Step back.** People must put some distance between themselves and the stressful situation at hand. This stops the momentum of stress.
- **Think.** People must identify what is causing stress in a particular situation.
- **Organize their thinking.** As thoughts often do not occur logically or sequentially, many people benefit from organizing their thoughts before taking meaningful action.
- **Proceed.** Move forward with increased clarity.

Inner Game Tool #2: Being the CEO

People must make the choice to be in charge of their own lives. They should utilize the *CEO* tool by answering eight questions:

1. *What are their mission statements?* People should be able to identify their primary missions in life.
2. *What are their primary products or services?* This defines what individuals' personal corporations do.
3. *What are their policies and values?* As CEOs, people get to decide which principles and philosophies guide their corporations.
4. *What are their priorities?* People must determine which of the corporation's goals are most important.
5. *What are their corporations' inner and outer resources?* People must evaluate the list of inner resources and determine if they are being used well.
6. *Who owns their corporations' shares?* People must create a list of others who have votes in their decision-making process.
7. *Why did they sell their shares?* It is important for people to determine if their shares were sold for approval, money, or love.
8. *How can they buy the shares back?* If people trade too many shares in a friendship in exchange for approval, they can buy the shares back at the risk of losing that sense of approval.

If you recognize that you are the CEO of your own life, you're free to consider where you came by an attitude and make any change you choose.

Inner Game Tool #3: The Three Control Questions

Many people feel overwhelmed and stressed when they are not in control of a situation. The *Control Questions* tool can help mitigate the negative feelings that arise when facing a stressor by having people create lists based on the following three questions:

1. What do they not control in the situation?
2. What are they currently trying to control?
3. What could they control that they are not presently controlling?

This exercise helps people realize that there are some things that are simply outside of their control, so consequently there is no use stressing about them. Additionally, it helps people regain a realistic sense of control by unlocking new opportunities that they had not recognized before.

Inner Game Tool #4: Trying On a New Attitude

An attitude is a set of fixed thoughts and concepts that influence people's perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. People can overcome negative attitudes by employing the *Trying On a Fresh Attitude* tool, which requires people

to pick a stressor, define what causes the stress, and then reflect honestly about their current attitude. The next step has people tap into their inner resources to then try on different attitudes and determine which one feels good. For example, if the attitude of resentment causes them stress, an attitude of gratitude might work better. Attitudes that feel good protect people from stress.

Inner Game Tool #5: The Magic Pen

The *Magic Pen* tool enables people to access their innate wisdom by tapping into their inner resources and Self 2. Using the Magic Pen tool involves the following three steps:

1. Selecting a stressful circumstance that needs wisdom outside of the commentary of Self 1.
2. Writing down all of the normal concepts and ideas the Self 1 usually projects onto the stressful circumstance.
3. A person should choose a handful of inner resources and imagine dipping a pen into each. With an empty mind, the individual must then allow the pen to write a message. For example, a person who is stressed about a child's bad behavior may endow the Magic Pen with serenity, patience, and empathy and write that he or she "knows how hard it is to be a kid."

Ultimately, the Inner Game is about wrapping and enjoying the gift of life. At times it might seem difficult, but it's actually the most natural thing in the world.

Inner Game Tool #6: Transpose

Stress arises when two people approach a situation with conflicting perspectives. The *Transpose* tool asks someone to put themselves in another person's shoes to determine what that person is thinking, feeling, and wanting.

By looking at a situation through the perspective of the other person, an individual can better access his or her empathy. Furthermore, understanding where someone else is coming from provides a person with a greater range of communication choices as well as a general sense of relief.

Inner Game Tool #7: Redefine

All people have certain unconscious lenses or definitions that color how they see the world and inform their responses. The *Redefine* tool aims to bring these lenses and definitions into conscious awareness so that people can let go of the ones that are not aligned with their current goals before choosing the ones that are.

To utilize the Redefine tool and build stability, people must first identify the individuals, activities, or words that cause them stress and then assign a key word to each. Next, they must:

- Identify the way the stressor is currently being defined.
- Determine where this definition originated.
- Question whether or not the current definition is in line with present circumstances and commitments.
- If not aligned, redefine the stressor so that it is brought into alignment with current circumstances and commitments.
- Apply the new definition to change the way the stressor is perceived.

For example, a man who defines being a father as being a problem solver can curb the stress he associates with this role by redefining fatherhood as an opportunity to experience parental love.

Inner Game Tool #8: The PLE Triangle

Stress can fester when people focus too much on their own performance in a task and do not make an effort to learn from or enjoy the experience. The *PLE triangle* is a tool that manages stress by balancing the three impor-

tant elements of performance, learning, and enjoyment. It helps manage the stress associated with a particular issue or situation by having people determine their performance goals, identify their learning possibilities, and identify the positive experiences they would like to have in the process of performing and learning.

Applying the Tools

The Inner Game toolbox can be of great benefit to people dealing with the stressful issue of growing old. By using the Redefine tool, for example, people can view retirement not as “being put out to pasture,” but as the start of a second life. People can also use the CEO tool to make their mission and primary product to enjoy the rest of their lives. Finally, Control Questions can help people put aging in perspective, allowing them to realize what they can actually control and what is simply out of their hands.

Conclusion

The Inner Game requires people to let go and be in the moment. It reminds people that success is not exclusively about money, power, and wealth, but also about achieving personal inner goals like happiness, contentment, and peace. At the end of the day, the Inner Game is about appreciating and taking pleasure in the gift of life. Playing the Inner Game well, therefore, should feel effortless.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Estimated Reading Time: 4 hours, 240 pages

The Inner Game of Stress explores the causes and dangerous physical effects of stress before providing readers with a set of Inner Game tools to achieve stability and peace. The authors demonstrate how people can overcome stress through a collection of case histories from Inner Game patients and seminar participants, along with helpful exercises. The book would benefit people who experience chronic stress in their personal or professional lives. Appendices provide answers to stress-related medical questions as well as additional resources for further reading.

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Acknowledgments

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By Liggy Webb

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

W. Timothy Gallwey has produced a series of bestselling *Inner Game* books, which set forth a new methodology for the development of personal and professional excellence in a variety of fields. For the last 20 years, Gallwey has been introducing the Inner Game approach to corporations looking for better ways to manage change. He lives in Malibu, California.

Edd Hanzelik, MD, is a board-certified internist who for more than 30 years has practiced a fresh approach to taking care of patients. He has worked with Dr. John Horton and W. Timothy Gallwey for more than 15 years to develop a practical solution to stress.

John Horton, MD, has collaborated with W. Timothy Gallwey on the *Inner Game* series for more than 30 years and with Dr. Edd Hanzelik on stress seminars for the last 15 years.

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