



Dear Life Coach Alex, there seem to be too much stress in this country when compared to Nigeria. How do I balance my work and life activities in order to avoid health issues, be more productive at work and spend more time with my family?

Thank you for asking this question. It is one of the most common topics that people seek Life Coaching for, and I know that many readers of the Nigerian Canadian Newspaper will learn as a result of your question.

When you leave a country like Nigeria where there is so much flexibility, to a country like Canada where things must be done in certain ways and certain times, and often with a price tag attached to it, it is a major paradigm shift that has been known to create health and relationship issues for many people. Besides hypertension and other health issues relating to stress, this paradigm shift has sadly resulted in many divorces within the Nigerian community, while many more are struggling with depression. Who would have known that the pursuit of happiness in developed countries like Canada would create so much havoc in the lives of many? Again, thank you for asking such an important question.

In Nigeria, relatives and friends often make the time to assist you with childminding; you have choices of very affordable maids; there are less bills to pay; and you can actually beg (or bribe) your way out of stressful situations like being caught driving over the speed limit, and delays at the hospital or government and business offices. Even the weather, society and government, which we really have no control over, are more predictable in Nigeria!

However, in Canada and other developed countries, there are so many bills to pay, which must be paid at particular times of the month regardless of when you get paid at work! Regardless of whom you are, you have to wait for your turn at hospitals, and government and business offices, and usually unable to beg your way out of stressful situations. You get a ticket if you are caught driving over the speed limit, and your insurance, which has very severe payment default consequences, may increase depending on how fast you were driving. If you decide to contest the ticket, you would either have to pay someone else to do so or take time off work to wait your turn in court. What is more, your work would usually pile up at work, for what you were paid to do in developed countries, you must do. Then, childminding, which we take for granted back in Nigeria, is a multi-billion dollar industry in Canada. If you discipline your children the way you would in Nigeria, or leave them home alone before their teenage years, you may lose them.

For sure, the impact of moving from a developing nation to one that is considered developed is paramount. And if you do not make the necessary adjustment in the way you think, act and speak, you will be unproductive at work and spend less time with your family. In our Work/Life Balance Coaching Program, the strategy that we have successfully used to help Nigerians and other people in similar situations to better cope with the stress of moving to a developed country is similar to two very popular quality control methodologies: PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) and DMAIC (Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control), which is part of the even more popular Six Sigma methodology.

Though self-explanatory, PDCA requires those who desire quality to first, PLAN, that is, establish the objectives and processes necessary to deliver results in accordance with the specifications; secondly, DO, that is, implement the processes; thirdly, CHECK, that is, monitor and evaluate the processes and results against objectives and specifications; and fourthly, ACT, that is, apply actions to the outcome for necessary improvement. Similarly, DMAIC requires that the seekers of quality to first, Define process improvement goals inline with customer demands and the enterprise strategy; secondly, Measure key aspects of the current process and collect relevant data; thirdly, Analyze the data to verify cause-and-effect relationships; fourthly, Improve or optimize the process based upon data analysis; and fifthly, Control to ensure that any deviations from target are corrected before they result in defects.

Both PDCA and DMAIC have been around for many, many years and known to have helped increase the output quality of corporations like Toyota, Motorola and American Express. In our Work/Life Balance Coaching Program, we exhort our students and clients to use a very similar concept, and have seen tremendous improvement in their works and lives. While you may contact us to help you with your specific situation, here is our stress management framework:

PLAN – Write down your plan for the day, advisably at least a week ahead. The concept of planning ahead may be seen as a cliché by those who struggle with it, but it is still the most effective use of your time. Like Abraham Lincoln once said, “Give me six hours to cut down a tree and I will spend the first four hours sharpening the axe”. Stress is a specific response by the body to a physical, mental, or emotional strain that disturbs or interferes with the normal physiological equilibrium of an organism. And planning, on the other hand, is an effective technique that facilitates the systematic execution of your objectives, thus eliminating the stress caused by non-execution.

PRIORITIZE – Prioritize your plan always. It is one thing to write down a list of things that you wish to accomplish tomorrow, but it is another thing to decide which one must be done first. Like Goethe once said, “The things that matter the most must never be at the mercy of the things that matter the least”. The most common mistake people make is to first execute the fun or easiest things on their to-do list, leaving them scrambling for time to complete the others, which may actually be more important. The notion of first completing the easiest tasks is beneficial, but only when you have prioritized your plan. In this way, only the least important things would remain uncompleted if time runs out.

PERFORM – Take action as planned. What good is planning and prioritization if you have no intention to execute accordingly? Some people are overstressed because they procrastinate and are easily distracted. They may plan and prioritize, but quick to answer an irrelevant phone call while executing something that requires unabashed concentration. You cannot perform if you want to be everything to everybody by getting engaged in everything. Without focus, nothing is accomplished, without performing, nothing is achieved. Like King Solomon once said, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven”. Become a performer rather than a procrastinator.

PERSUADE – Are you stressed because you assume too much things, because you don’t ask for help, because you are uncomfortable saying no to demands of your time and efforts? An effective work strategy that our clients say works well for them is to always document the list of your workload and then regularly have your boss determine the priorities. In this way, you are able to work with him to arrive at mutual expectations that are manageable. Also, since it is not in our culture, we would gladly coach you on how to tactfully decline never-ending demands of your time, effort and resources, especially from family members and people of higher authority. Become a persuader rather than a pleaser.

PERUSE – This means to observe; to examine with care or consider with attention and in detail. This is where we coach our clients on how to leverage the power of meditation and reflection to ascertain and appreciate their workload and accomplishments because we have realized that the people who complain of being consistently tired and stressed are those who never spend time meditating in the morning and reflecting in the evening. They work day in and day out without taking the time to observe progress. To better manage your stress level, get up early from bed to meditate in the morning and then take time to reflect at least 3 times during the day, with one longer one before going to bed.

PLAY – Even machineries and computers that have no feelings and emotions still require downtime to “relax”, to be “strengthened”, “encouraged” and “reinvigorated”. What about you? Church and flamboyant parties are not relaxation outlets. Watch a comedy, go bowling, swimming, biking, and golfing. Though not in our culture, make it a point to engage in something relaxing at least once a week. Find something or somewhere that would help you to mentally withdraw from life’s never-ending stress. Take a vacation to where you have no relatives. In the words of King Solomon, “I commend the enjoyment of life because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.”



Alex Nosa Ihama is a Life, Business and Executive Coach, who has been facilitating Marriage, Parenting, Career and Leadership workshops and seminars for years. Either face-to-face, or through the phone and email, he has personally coached hundreds of people worldwide and tens of thousands more through his website. This is in addition to his countless motivating and inspirational articles and newsletters that are now received in over 70 countries. Alex strongly believes that the key to success, which he defines as contentment, is in the hands of each individual regardless of his or her situation and circumstance.

This is the fundamental statement upon which he founded the three organizations: The Exhortation Institute of Life and Business Skills, The Exhortation Life and Business Coaching Services and the Exhortation World Outreach.

If you require coaching in a specific area of your life or business, or would like this message delivered personally in the form of a keynote, workshop or seminar at your workplace, church, organization or community event, or to share your much-appreciated feedback and questions with him, send an email to alex.ihama@TheExhortation.com. For more information, visit his website, www.TheExhortation.com.

While all questions will be responded to by the Life Coach, yours may be the next topic for Our Life Coaching Corner!