



Seeds of Doubt Lead To Seeds of Promise: How Stress Leads to Success

By Liz DiMarco Weinmann

It is good for you and never too late to:

- 1) take up new physical activities,
- 2) engage in new social activities and
- 3) pursue new intellectual challenges that can make a positive difference in your well-being – for the short-run and in the years ahead.

If you happen to be job-hunting over the age of 40, after many years of being firmly entrenched in the same company, industry or location, you're probably feeling that is a daring project in and of itself – which it is. In that case, plant something new that takes care of your innermost self and boosts your confidence and sense of control while you're grappling with change. Plant something that improves your physical health, ramps up your intellectual power and unleashes beneficial brain chemicals that contribute to your well-being. Here are just a few of the reasons experts advise you should plant new seeds now, especially if you're dealing with added stress.

1.) *If Your Sneakers Are Moldy, Your Brain Will Get Oldie.* A few years ago, the only weight I ever pushed around came from the sound of my own loud mouth. A year later, and dozens of pounds lost, I can attest that exercise saved my life, improved my well-being and enhanced my intellectual focus. Here's why it would work for you:

- *Dr. John Medina, a developmental molecular biologist, says in his book, "Brain Rules," that a lifetime of exercise can result in a sometimes astonishing elevation in cognitive performance, compared with those who are sedentary.* Medina asserts that exercisers outperform couch potatoes in all sorts of brain metrics tests, such as those that measure long-term memory, reasoning, attention, problem-solving, even so-called fluid-intelligence tasks – which refers to how you put to use the information that you learn. One of the biggest surprises is that you don't even have to exercise that long or hard to

reap these benefits! Did you know that even walking several times a week will benefit your brain? The ideal is doing two to three bouts of aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes – which can reduce your risk of Alzheimer’s by 60%!

- *Exercise improves your mood because it stimulates the release of three feel good chemicals in your brain.* Called neurotransmitters, their medical names are serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine. By stimulating the release of these hormones, exercise has been proven to help lower depression and anxiety. So, get out there and walk off the stress, or go for a bike ride, or – if you’re not the outdoorsy type – put on some music and dance like a fool in your own home.

2.) If the only laugh lines you have are from watching late-night Seinfeld reruns on TBS, you need to get some real friends. When was the last time you had a conversation with a friend who made you laugh? More importantly, when was the last time you actually felt you could cry with a good friend who wouldn’t judge you? If you don’t have friends like that, maybe now’s the time to consider going beyond your current circle of friends (or all those online LinkedIn connections. Would you ever want any of them to see you with streaked mascara? I didn’t think so.)

Additional tips:

- *Be proactive about cultivating, engaging and caring about people you really want as friends, and weed out the ones who don’t feel that way about you.* In this day and age it’s too easy to rationalize that there are many other things we need to be doing work- and family- wise rather than spending time with friends. Yet, connections with true friends and family members are what matters to our well-being.
- *According to psychoanalyst, educator and author, Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., positive social interactions are a powerful mechanism for controlling stress.* As women talk with other women about worrisome occurrences in their lives, their stress levels fall because oxytocin (the maternal friendship and bonding hormone) levels rise. Even during non-stressful times, having solid friendships has been proven to improve health and extend one’s lifespan.
- *If you’ve been a mom for most of your adult life and your circle of friends is tied to your children, now might be the perfect time to expand your circle of friends.* Getting involved in organizations other than your children’s school or church expands your perspectives.

3.) Unchain Your Brain, Train Against the Drain. Learning a new language, researching the competition before starting a company or learning to play a musical instrument are all exercises to unchain your brain. To plant or seed something new, challenging and fulfilling while waiting for the next big thing to take seed, it’s a good idea to engage in an activity that is not related to a work situation or family demand.

The following are a few reasons why:

- *Taking up new intellectual activities stimulates different neural regions and develops new pathways within the brain.* This helps to re-energize the brain against the dreaded “brain-drain” many women complain about in middle age, and helps you see problems in a

different light. As Dr. John Medina writes in *Brain Rules*, “What you do and learn in life physically changes what your brain looks like – it literally rewires it.”

- *The more you stimulate the neural regions and pathways, the more adept you become at the new skill or activity you’re learning.* It’s that fluid intelligence thing again. One of the other major benefits of taking up new intellectual activities is that it increases your self-confidence that you can, indeed, learn new things.
- *There are nine different kinds of intelligence, but most people neglect to explore, let alone develop, those outside their comfort zone.* Conversely, we all know of artists, musicians, business-owners and scientists who did their best work after the age of 40, 50 or even 60. By developing different facets of their intellectual capacity, they surpassed the creativity and productivity of their youth in ways they never would have dared or imagined earlier in their lives.
- Those are just a few of the reasons *why* planting something new – physically, socially or intellectually – can be beneficial both in the short run and over the long haul, even in times of stress. Next week, we’ll provide a list of ideas for *what* to plant or seed. There’s no limit to why, what, where and how you can grow by daring yourself!

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