

An Effective Stress Prevention Training: Research From Four Diverse Organizations

D. Rozman, R. McCraty, B. Barrios-Choplin

Proceedings of the Ninth International Montreux Congress on Stress, Montreux, Switzerland, 1997.

This presentation summarizes the results of four studies on stress prevention training in four diverse organizations. In each case, participating employees attended an Inner Quality Management (IQM) seminar which includes the stress prevention technique "Freeze-Frame." This technique allows individuals to alter their interpretation of potentially stressful events by evoking a sincere feeling of appreciation, then reassessing the events from a more positive perspective. This technique is predicted to reduce tension, anger, burnout and physical symptoms of stress, while increasing positive feelings and perceptions and productive responses.

The entire IQM seminar also includes modules on empathic communication, intuitive thinking and holistic goal setting. Therefore, the prediction is for improvements in communication, mental focus, goal clarity and ultimately job satisfaction and productivity.

The first study was conducted in a Fortune 100 consumer electronics firm. Nine managers, nine engineers and 30 factory workers completed a survey, attended the IQM seminar, practiced the techniques for several months, then completed the survey again.

The various groups reported significant reductions in nervousness, tension, anxiety and physical symptoms of stress. Conversely, there were significant increases in contentment, communication, and job satisfaction. This study also measured blood pressure and Heart Rate Variability (HRV) in a sub-sample. There were significant decreases in high blood pressure, as well as improved HRV.

The second study involved a Canadian human resource development consulting firm. In addition to the IQM seminar, this firm had a sub-set of its employees attend a five day seminar to become certified as Freeze-Frame trainers. Fifty-seven employees completed a survey prior to the IQM training, and 31 completed the same survey one year later. There was a significant reduction in tension from time one to time two. Also, the sub-set that had attended the certification training had lower levels of burnout than those who didn't attend. Finally, the more frequently the employees practiced Freeze-Frame, the less frequently they reported feeling angry.

The third study was conducted internally by Canada's second largest bank. The bank had five employees trained to be certified in the Freeze-Frame technique. These trainers subsequently delivered the Freeze-Frame portion of the IQM seminar to 1200 employees. They then surveyed all 1200 employees at several intervals of practice. Seventy-one percent of those surveyed reported ongoing use of the Freeze-Frame technique. Of these, 86% use it at work and 55% use it at home. Of the users, 73% reported their behavior has changed for the better as a result of using the technique, and 82% stated that it has improved their overall health and well being.

The fourth study involved a unit of a California State government agency. One hundred and thirty-four participants completed surveys prior to the IQM seminar. Six weeks after the seminar 115 participants completed the same survey. There were significant decreases in anger, anxiety, burnout, tension, and physical symptoms of stress. There was also a significant increase in peacefulness. Regression analysis revealed a significant relationship between use of the Freeze-Frame and other IQM techniques and reductions in anxiety, burnout, and physical symptoms of stress.

Taken together, these studies offer a compelling argument for the efficacy of techniques which prevent stress by altering interpretive styles. In the case of Freeze-Frame and IQM, the results go beyond stress symptoms and tension to important physiological changes in blood pressure and HRV. Additionally, emotions and reactions were better managed through using these techniques. Finally, workplace outcomes such as job satisfaction and communication improved, which should eventually affect productivity.

The results discussed were achieved at a relatively low cost, and could save organizations significant expenditures on stress-related inefficiencies and health care costs. Additionally, the techniques are portable and available to individuals in the midst of activity, at the moment they are most needed, unlike most coping behaviors such as exercise, meditation, rest or vacations. The most encouraging implication of these studies is that individuals may have more control over their emotions and perceptions, stress and health than previously recognized.