



Extreme Economic Times Call for Xtreme Stress Management

Stressed is just desserts spelled backwards. Yeah, right.

Just like losing your job, or struggling to meet your mortgage obligations, or delaying your retirement really mean “Life is just one big bowl of cherries.” And need I mention to you that the new definition of bailout is “graciously and generously handing over \$70 billion to fat cats so remorse or worry won’t impinge on the lavish lifestyles afforded by their multi-million-dollar severance packages.”

Uh huh.

If there’s ever been a series of events more stressful than today’s global financial crisis to the average American, it sure escaped my notice. Amid endless news stories filled with confusing economic theories, the media is running hundreds of sidebars about the emotional toll current goings on are taking on innocent citizens.

Just take a gander at these headlines: “Don’t let the economy kill you: As stress spreads in the wake of this financial storm, Americans risk paying with their health,” from USA Today. “Upgrading the stress levels. The business traveler’s life gets a little more rattled. To the usual list of woes, add a financial crisis and a 24-hour news barrage,” from the New York Times. “Whether the sky is falling or not, times are definitely going to get tougher, and you can’t count on anyone to bail you out. It’s time to grow up,” from www.msn.com

As you might imagine, these articles abound with stress-busting tips that attempt to give you a sense of power: Release tense muscles with gentle neck and shoulder rolls. Meditate to soothing music in a calm, serene environment. Visualize relaxing nature scenes as you drift off to sleep. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

In desperate moments like these, I suggest that any technique connected with adjectives like “gentle,” “soothing” and “relaxing” just won’t cut it. This is no time for serenity. To cope in this milieu, I believe you need to go for the gusto, play your aggressive game, fight until the plus-sized woman sings.

In a deliberate effort to shift an outdated wussy paradigm about surviving tough times, I propose an immediate shift to Xtreme Stress Management. Here are a few fresh ideas to help you remain unsinged while the economy burns:

Release old notions. If you’ve ever taken a class or read a book about keeping your cool while your world unravels, you undoubtedly have a brain full of aerie-faerie tips such as “pace yourself” and “light candles.” No, no, no. This very minute, before reading this wonderful how-to list, make a commitment to forget your hot baths and focus on your hot temper.

Learn voodoo. Or, at the very least, buy a soft doll and some really large pins. Whenever you catch a glimpse of a New York financier on television, in print, or on your computer screen, immediately and vigorously stab your voodoo figure. To release as much rage as possible, I suggest you develop a non-oomy mantra along the lines of “You big creep. How could you line your pockets while destroying the lives of millions of innocent people? I hope you burn in heck.” Or, you can shorten your saying to a rhythmic yet threatening “Phooey on you-ey.”

- **Throw hard punches.** Your bed pillow is a wise choice for a target. Before punching your inanimate object into oblivion, I urge you to take the time to



give it a name. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, the guy who several weeks ago proposed that taxpayers give him \$70 billion with no questions asked, is my top choice. While you're at it, paste Paulson's photo on your pillow case. Then smack him repeatedly in the old snocker.

- **Scream and shout.** What else is the Internet for? Ordinarily, you probably are not a flamer, a term used to describe obnoxious online chatters and bloggers. But these are far from ordinary times. One website to get yourself all riled up by reading the facts: www.huffingtonpost.com.
- **Hire a hit man.** In this case, "hit" stands for "hear I tirades." Yes, I know "I" should be "my," but whoever heard of an "hmt" man. Anyway, this person would listen to your endless ranting against the entire global financial establishment, including that handsome Parisian who once cheated you during a casual money exchange on the streets of the Left Bank.
- **Set fires.** This technique unstresses me every time. Whenever I feel enraged with someone, I write the individual's name on a notepad and then light the paper with a match. I always conduct this exercise at the kitchen sink, with a faucet with running water readily available. To ensure your safety, please do not try this at someone else's home.
- **Embrace your inner jailbird.** Personally, I think many people refrain from perfectly law-abiding activities because of fear of ending up in a prison cell next to Bruno the Butcher or, worse yet, disgraced football star O.J. Simpson. Something I now fantasize on a regular basis: organizing protests outside the homes of banking executives whose fortunes have continued to go up as yours and mine go down. Until police realized I was innocent of wrongdoing, I suspect such action might result in my spending a few hours behind bars -- but who cares? I'm thin and look good in horizontal stripes.

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