Book Review

Luskin, F. & Pelletier, K. (2005). *Stress Free for Good: 10 Scientifically Proven Life Skills for Health and happiness*. New York: HarperCollins.

We live in an age and culture where the word “stress” has become a staple in our vocabulary. Stress has always been around, but in today’s fast-paced world, it has gained much more attention. Since the early twentieth century, stress management has been the topic of many books. Each has had its own suggestions on how to ease the consequences of a stressful life. Stress can be dealt with in numerous ways; some are healthy, and some are detrimental.

Luskin and Pelletier observed in their practices as physicians that many of their patients’ ailments were actually rooted in unmanaged stress rather than organic problems. As a result of their observations, they began looking for methods that could be easily taught to their patients. These methods could then be practiced by their patients anytime without medical assistance. In their book, *Stress Free for Good*, Luskin and Pelletier shared the ten life skills that they teach to their patients to manage stress effectively. The skills outlined in the book can be divided into two categories: physical and cognitive.

Among the physical skills, Luskin and Pelletier included learning how to take slow, deep breathes and to intentionally tense and relax the body’s various muscle groups. These two simple techniques help to counteract the body’s natural fight-or-flight response to any stressful event, whether there is actual danger or not. Another skill that they recommended is simply to smile. Although this practice may sound simplistic, smiling is an easy way for people to take control over stressful situations and elicit positive responses from those around them.

Along with physical skills, the authors also suggested several psychosocial techniques to help deal with stress. One of the most interesting techniques is learning how to visualize being successful. The premise of this technique is that we desire greatly to accomplish our goals, and when we feel that we are failing, we become stressed. Therefore, if individuals can learn to visualize being successful, they tend to develop more positive attitudes and indeed accomplish their goals.

The authors also talked about two other techniques that are effective in reducing stress in people’s lives, but they are more difficult to

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master. One skill is to develop the ability to say “no” to requests and responsibilities that are in conflict with personal values and goals. The other skill is to learn to slow down. These two techniques go hand-in-hand. When people become so busy, trying to keep up with obligations, especially those that do not align with their personal values and goals, they bring unnecessary stress into their lives. Learning to slow down and evaluate critically their commitments allows them time to recharge mentally and to focus on the positive events in their lives.

Luskin and Pelletier offered readers simple, beneficial skills with many examples for coping with stress. One potential drawback was that most of the case studies were supported only by the authors’ observations and not much other research. Even so, there is plenty of useful information for professionals and lay people alike.

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