

How to Handle the Stress of Entrepreneurship

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Many older Americans dream about working for themselves. Yet new business owners often find entrepreneurship stressful, especially during the lean start-up years.

Fortunately, experts say that while some entrepreneurial stress is inevitable, you can learn to manage it better. "Working independently is like athletics," writes strategy consultant Steven Cristol in his book, "[No Boss!](https://noboss.me/)" "It requires not just dedication and persistence but also training the mind to think and behave in ways that make self-employment work for you."

I recently spoke to Cristol to get his thoughts on how best to ease the stress of entrepreneurship. I also reached out to Dr. Elissa Epel, author of "[The Stress Prescription](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/671990/the-stress-prescription-by-elissa-epel-phd/)" and a vice chair in the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of California at San Francisco, for her insights. Here are five key recommendations to help you stress less as you build your new business:

Entrepreneur Tip Sheet

1. Assess Your Stressors. Starting a business involves risk, uncertainty and a steep learning curve. Some people thrive on the challenge, while others are overwhelmed.

"So many people have this dream of running their own thing," says Cristol. "But it doesn't mean they're particularly well suited for the rigors of entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, they often don't think about it until they are in the thick of it and then it's a struggle."

So, before you strike out on your own, think long and hard about your ability to tolerate the stress of being an

entrepreneur. If you tend to be risk averse, uncomfortable with change or prone to worry, this might not be the best path for you.

2. Don't Go It Alone. Entrepreneurship can be lonely, especially after a long career spent working as part of a larger team. The isolation can be especially problematic for people who work virtually or in e-commerce, with few opportunities for in-person socialization. But just because you work on your own, that doesn't mean you have to exclude people from your work life.

"Find other people to be part of the adventure," says Cristol. Since leaving the advertising field and starting his coaching and consulting business, he has worked hard to build relationships with other service providers, who over time, have turned into friends, advisors and collaborators.

"It would have been much lonelier if I tried to do everything myself," he says, adding that his fellow entrepreneurs are among the very smartest people he knows who provide him with invaluable support. As he writes in his book, "Don't let your ego believe that you're just too damned smart to learn from someone else's deep experience or to benefit from their objectivity."

3. Hire Help (Selectively). Tackling a long to-do list on a shoestring budget is one of the biggest stressors of early-stage entrepreneurs. "It's hard to part with a dollar in the early going," admits Cristol. "But if you do everything yourself for too long it can put a drag on your productivity." The trick is to find ways to get help, but on a limited basis.

Cristol emphasizes that paying for help doesn't have to be open-ended. "If it's for a specific project, arrange a fixed fee," he says. "If it's ongoing, set a limit on how many hours you're willing to pay for and stick to it. Like any good investment, the time and energy you put into getting help, and the money you part with initially, will deliver a handsome return if you choose people and tasks carefully."



4. Celebrate the Benefits of Your Age. Older entrepreneurs bring years of experience and professional contacts to their ventures. And, Epel notes, as we age, we develop more resilience skills.

(<https://www.schulzefamilyfoundation.org/>) and [EIX](https://eiexchange.com/).
(<https://eiexchange.com/>)

"We don't sweat the small stuff as much," she says. "We've had more experience with failure and expect the road will be rocky. We see the challenges and obstacles we face with greater perspective, with a wider lens, so that we face them with more confidence, knowing we will find ways to get by."

Cristol adds that older workers often feel like they have less to lose at this point in their career, with a little bit more of a "been there, done that" sensibility.

5. Prioritize Self-Care. While we can't change many stressful situations in our personal lives or in our social world, we can change the way we react to that stress. In her book, Epel describes stress-reduction practices (most require less than 10 minutes) that you can do each day to recover quicker from stressful events. In her book, she refers to [exercise](https://www.nextavenue.org/exercise-to-exorcise/) as "the medicinal power of movement."

Invest Time in Yourself

She is especially partial to high-intensity interval training (HIIT), very brief bouts of intense exercise that helps people looking improve their stress resilience. (You can search online for a 7-minute guided HIIT routine, or, if you haven't been active for a while, start with something easier, like slow to brisk walking for ten minutes).

Epel also urges people to get out in [nature](https://www.nextavenue.org/sticks-stones-for-better-health/) . By shifting our physical environment, we can shift our mental state. Immersing ourselves in nature forces us to take a break from our screens and help to release our creativity.

"Nature," she writes, "is unique in its capacity to soothe, to calm, to put things into perspective and to shrink stressors that once seemed huge."

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