

# Emotional Intelligence Coaching: Six Strategies to Build Stress Tolerance, Improve EI

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*“Under stress, your ability to access your Emotional Intelligence decreases.”*

The underlying theme in most companies seems to be “Too much to do and not enough resources”—including time. A fast-paced economy and a do-more-with-less business mentality have ramped up workplace stress to alarmingly high levels.

The world is filled with books, articles and videos about stress—why too much is bad for you and what to do about it. But what exactly does the adverse effect of stress have to do with your Emotional Intelligence (EI)? In a word, plenty!

Emotional Intelligence is a key driver of how people relate to each other—how they get along. If emotions are misinterpreted, emotionally charged encounters can escalate, leading to damaged relationships or poor decisions. Under stress, your ability to access your Emotional Intelligence decreases. That’s why a key competency of Emotional Intelligence is Stress Tolerance.

*“Stress Tolerance is the ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without developing physical or emotional symptoms, by actively and positively coping with stress.”*

~The EQ Edge (Steven Stein, Ph.D. & Howard Book, M.D.)

You may have heard the expression “You can’t stop the waves but you can learn how to surf.” If the waves represent stress, then Stress Tolerance is like learning how to surf.

Stress Tolerance is measured by the EQ-i 2.0® as part of the Composite Scale that also includes Flexibility and Optimism (see Model). The EQ-i 2.0 is the most scientifically-validated EI

assessment on the market today. In *Handbook for Developing Social and Emotional Intelligence* (Pfeiffer, 2009) co-editor Dr. Henry L. Thompson describes the impact of stress on people taking the EQ-i. In one experiment he conducted, people who completed the EQ-i in a normal mindset had an average EI score of 101. When the same people completed the instrument in a stressed mindset, the average EI score dropped over 20 points!

Programs underway in many organiza-



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tions to increase leader and employee EI are either unaware of or overlook the negative impact of stress on Emotional Intelligence. In most cases, it would be easier to develop Stress Tolerance to preserve current levels of EI. It makes sense that part of building Stress Tolerance should include eliminating unnecessary stressors from your day. Identify the obvious and also the “hidden” stressors in your life and take steps to get rid of them. Oftentimes, professional coaches help in this process. With that in mind, consider the following coaching tips.



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*“In addition to preserving access to your EI, developing Stress Tolerance is great for your overall health.”*

#### About the Author

Grenae Thompson writes content that connects people with ideas and resources to facilitate collaboration and self improvement. She is the EVP of Admin & Marketing at High Performing Systems, Inc.



## Six Strategies to Boost Stress Tolerance

### 1) Step Away from the Screens.

We tell ourselves that we need a little break to rest our minds from work, so we check in to see what’s happening on Facebook or other social media. According to recent research from Denmark, however, this could just be adding more stress. In the Denmark study, people were divided into two groups: one accessed Facebook as normal, and the other group stopped all usage for seven days. At the end of the week, those in the second group were 55% less stressed!

**2) Get Enough Sleep.** This might be the single most important thing you can do to improve your ability to tolerate stress. Stress could be keeping you awake, or not getting enough sleep could be increasing stress—it’s a vicious cycle. Take steps to ensure that you get seven to nine hours of sleep each night. If possible, take one or two power naps during the day.

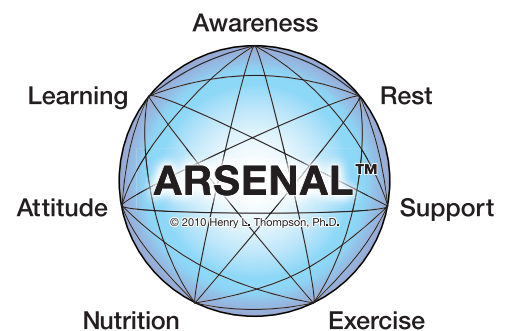
**3) Exercise.** Exercise helps the brain reorganize to be more resilient to stress. Many people think of exercise as joining a gym or training for a marathon. It’s just too overwhelming, so they resist getting started. The best way to begin is with small steps. Find ways to move more and build core strength without ever seeing the inside of a gym. Some easy ideas: get a set of hand weights to use at home, take the stairs or park farther away.

**4) Focus on Nutrition.** Healthy eating is key to improving Stress Tolerance. Like exercise, making changes to nutrition can be daunting. Again, take small steps. Drink more water and cut back on sugar and caffeine to start. Plan your meals and snacks to help resist

the urge to grab unhealthy food when you are hungry.

### 5) Improve Optimism and Flexibility.

These are the EI competencies that along with Stress Tolerance make up the EQ-i Stress Management Scale. As with all EQ-i competencies, more is not always better. For example, one can be too optimistic or not optimistic enough. If being too flexible leaves you little time to focus on priorities, adding more structure could help. Balance is the key.



### 6) Build an ARSENAL Against Stress!

Find out how stress resilient you currently are by taking a proven assessment like the ARSENAL. The ARSENAL measures your overall stress level as well as how well you are doing in each of the seven best practices for resisting the negative effects of stress. The ARSENAL Feedback Report provides a step-by-step plan to help you increase stress resilience.

Stress Tolerance is the key to living with stress and minimizing damage to health, relationships, performance and Emotional Intelligence. In addition to preserving access to your EI, developing Stress Tolerance is great for your overall health. Add your own resilience-building practices to the above coaching tips and share them with your team members or co-workers to boost your organization’s stress coping capabilities.

**Contact HPS to Learn More About the EQ-i 2.0 and Certification Training**  
Visit HPS online at [www.hpsys.com](http://www.hpsys.com) or call 800.535.8445.