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THE EFFORTLESS PATH - MANAGING STRESS WITH BUDÔ

*With the principles of **BUDÔ** – the Way of Martial Arts – it is possible to maintain a high level of energy on a daily basis*

THE PROBLEM – FOR ALL OF US!

All of us - whether teacher or department head, a mother advancing her career or an entrepreneur - have to deal with an increasing number of problems and challenges.

The incredible speed with which technology advances today, creates a reality of constant change:

We absorb tasks that used to be done by either people of a completely different profession or by our colleagues. In the office we deal with new products, processes and systems. The same happens at home. The consequence is an increasing complexity of every-day life with a wide variety of often disconnected activities:



- Buying a cell phone or leading a project – technology demands making a choice at every single step of the process. Thus, a growing number of decisions have to be taken on different, interdependent levels.
- Each new possibility we gain also means absorbing new information, learning different skills, and broadening our knowledge.

Many times then, we react with an inversion of priorities. Small obstacles grow out of proportion, while core problems are not dealt with because we "don't have the time".

High blood pressure, burn-out, insomnia, and impatience are the most common results of this situation. They, in turn, affect the quality - and motivation - with which we do our jobs or engage in social life.

Furthermore, **chronic stress causes severe damage to our health.** To live with this stress year after year often makes these damages **irreversible!**

Instead of enjoying life, constructed with so much energy – the leisure times, successes, times with family or friends ... the chronically stressed goes from one **doctor's appointment** to the next, takes **medication** against high blood pressure, suffers from frequent **back** and **head aches** – or is constantly **exhausted** and **burned out!**

Technology drives change!

A multitude of new opportunities opens up every day. But the growing complexity of our lives also causes feelings of being overwhelmed, incompetent or under constant pressure.

Micro-management

We handle the problems we feel can solve - instead of those we should!

"THE EYE OF THE STORM" – CHANGING THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIFE

Our perception is the key!

Our own **perception** of a situation as "stressful" – **not** the situation as such – causes the stress.

Whether we are able or not to **serenely** deal with the different aspects of our lives depends on our basic **attitude**. And this attitude depends directly on our **perception**.

Stress is a series of physiological reactions which occur when we **interpret** a situation as stressful. Our body then reacts with an increased level of activity:

- A rapid heart beat, tense muscles and shallow breathing

The opposite occurs when we feel comfortable with a situation:

- The heart beat slows down, muscles relax, and the slower breath provides us with more oxygen

Many people already recognized this and are on their way to find an attitude which strengthens their health and lets them be more aware, so they can act with focus - even in the eye of the storm!

Our center is the starting point!

The center is our place of observation and rest. There we can take a distance, renew our energies, and plan our actions.

THE SECRET OF CHANGE – SELF-PERCEPTION & MINDFULNESS

To be able to change our perception – we need to **perceive** first! To improve this is a long path of constant work and starts with sharpening the perception of ourselves: our physical feelings, emotions and thoughts.

This can only work, if we are "centered" in ourselves. In our center, as in the eye of the storm, there is only stillness – never activity.

To be centered means to be relaxed and emotionally somewhat distanced - to be serene. This way we can perceive our thoughts **(judgments!)** – which in turn cause our emotions and states of spirit.

Through observation and reflection from a position of inner calm, we train our perception to be able to identify the most important problems. With this mindfulness we can find constructive thoughts and develop adequate behaviors for problematic situations.

The path is the goal!

We need to learn to fall in a way to be able get up again swiftly - not to avoid defeats.

HOW BUDÔ PROMOTES A MINDFUL AND RELAXED ATTITUDE

Budô, the **Martial Way** in Japan, is - among many other Eastern disciplines - a form of personal development. Budô uses fighting techniques to reach this goal, just as *Ikebana* uses the arrangement of flowers, and *Chadô* the tea ceremony. To study Budô is an endless task, and one life alone would not be sufficient to research all its principles.

Hence, for this paper we concentrated on three of the most basic concepts of Budô: Self-perception, Harmony, and Adequate Use of Energy.





The less resistance there is, the more energy flows through the wire!

Our capability to deal with problems grows to the same extent that we cease to resist.

- Budô promotes **Self-perception** through exercises which need a very precise coordination of the body & mind. These complex movements only work, if you can perceive with fairly good precision how your body - and its different parts - move: What - exactly - am I doing with my right arm? And the left foot? Where am I looking? What am I thinking? What is my intention? Etc.
- To be in **Harmony** with the opponent is important in the Martial Way. To harmonize oneself with the energy and movements of the other means ceasing to **resist** while being aware of his or her intentions. Instead of wasting our energy with resistance, we use the energy of the attack to do our own movements in a fluid manner.
- To act with **Adequate Use of Energy** means to not use more - or less - force than necessary to execute a specific movement. This results in greater readiness, more calm and enduring strength to deal with continuous attacks. But mainly we save energy to act swiftly after having been "defeated" during an attack!

These three principles are **directly transferable** to situations of stress in our daily lives. The **"attack"** is the **stressor**: (our interpretation of!) a situation that we have to deal with.

- First, we have to **perceive** that we feel(!) "attacked" - meaning we are **stressed**. Many times we just react without even being conscious that we feel this way in the first place.
- People almost automatically **resist** to change, because everything that is new or different takes us away from our "comfort zone". Since our environment is changing so rapidly nowadays, this resistance consumes a good part of our energies. Only when we become aware **where** the stressor causes pressure inside of us, can we **use this energy** for our own goals.
- When working or dealing with problems most people use the principle, "The **harder** it gets (and that is usually a very personal interpretation), the **harder** I work": *They fight, make an effort, they struggle...* Mostly this means doing the same - only much more of it. It would be better, though, to work **smarter**, not harder. This means to be in the **Here and Now** - instead of delving into thoughts like "won't work", "should" or "could". At the same time, it is important to maintain the **necessary distance** to calmly evaluate the situation and identify the core problems.

Self-Perception
Harmony
Adequate Use of Energy

Over and over again we pass these three points in the never-ending spiral of self-development.

To develop these skills so that we will never again be completely stressed out and are always able to react adequately and in a relaxed manner is, of course, almost impossible.

That is why **Budô** is a **Way** - and not an objective - with many obstacles, blind spots and confusing crossroads. Each one chooses his or her very own path, which provides the best personal learning opportunities.

CHOOSING A STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM – A GUIDE

Programs that promise techniques for stress management can only be successful, if the one who is looking for them already made the decision to change his or her attitude towards life.

It is necessary to **change** the attitude of **"I need to"** to one that says **"I choose to"**. To do this is a long path with many defeats.

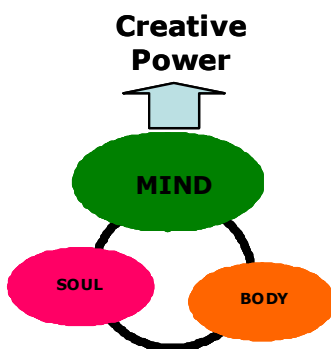
This also means that one single program cannot solve the problem on a long-term basis. **Continuous** practice is essential for this process.

We are complex beings – combining mind, body and soul. Stress – or serenity – influences us on all these levels. And, although these three elements depend on each other, our **mind** still has the greatest power.

This is why we need to start here, if we want to initiate any progress.

Consequently, a stress-management program should include the following:

- **Changing the attitude**, starting with constructive thoughts
- **Experiences** which make it possible to perceive the effects of positive - and negative - thoughts in a **holistic** and **integrative** manner
- Techniques for **physical** and **emotional relaxation** ("letting go"), as well as for **concentration**, which can be repeated - without any further instructions - in every-day life
- Regular **follow-up programs**, in a certain **frequency** (between four and twelve weeks apart) and over a certain amount of **time** (at least six months, better one year)
- Tips and support to find adequate **complementary activities** (like meditation, yoga, arts, sports...), to guarantee continuous personal development



It's our choice!

Do we see ourselves as **victims** of our circumstances - or as the **creator** of our own possibilities? How we lead our lives depends **solely** on us!

NOW WHAT?

The most important thing is to **do** something! Otherwise it is likely that you will damage your health permanently.

It is **never too late** to start a healthy and satisfying life - **especially** when it seem that you have **no time** for activities which could help balancing your life!

And it is not necessary to do everything at the same time:

"How do you eat an elephant?"- "In small pieces!"

It is better to do **one single step** – as small as it might be – than to do none at all!

But the first step is always the most difficult one. To look for support here creates motivation. If you have decided to change something - and are looking for some orientation - just call us.

We support you to develop your very own path and do the first steps!

A shift in attitude demands continuous motivation!

Look for support and structures to promote this process.



The Authors

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Together with **Silke Koerner** he has been developing personal development seminars since 1992. For these, they use the experiential learning methodology in innovative combinations with other approaches.

Both have a rich, international experience living and working on three continents and in a number of different countries.

To do activities in groups not only motivates to actually go ahead and start them. It also helps to continue later on. This is why we developed a program for groups between six and twenty people:

- Enough participants so the group creates its own dynamic
- Not too many, so that people do not "disappear"

The program "**SHTEP - The Inner Balance**"[®] uses a modern martial art to achieve the goals described above: **Aikidô**.

Aikidô was developed between the 1930s and 1960s by the martial arts master Morihei Ueshiba. It is an art of self-defense – you cannot attack with Aikidô techniques – and means "The Way (Dô) of Harmony (Ai) with Life Energy (Ki)".

The goal is to harmonize oneself with the energy of the opponent, to then use it for one's own movements. Instead of injuring the other, he or she is being controlled while continuing his or her own movement.

Another essential aspect is to learn how to fall without getting hurt. People learn how to get up while "falling" and gain adequate distance again. This way they learn how to use their "**defeats**" for continuation and progress.

Obviously we do not teach Aikidô in our seminars– this demands years of intensive training.

We do use though the **principles** and **exercises** of this art. Thus, we generate **concrete experiences** of the impact of thoughts, techniques, and attitudes in moments of stress.

SHTEP means **Self**-perception, **H**armony and **T**he **E**ffortless **P**ath. We work with these concepts in this order, because they build upon each other.

After the first seminar there are regular follow-up units to consolidate, discuss and enlarge the learned techniques.

In these units there is also room to integrate one's own experiences with complementary activities to the **SHTEP - The Inner Balance**[®] seminar.

Since **SHTEP**[®] is a holistic approach it is valid in all aspects of our lives. This is why we also developed **leadership and team development seminars** using the same method.

Talk with us, if you want to learn more about our seminars.