

## How To Relax Under Pressure

If you are stressed in almost any situation, chances are you need to relax more. Before we go there, let me talk about relaxing under pressure in sport and then we can talk about business and family situations. I was down at the Martial Arts center the other day and I was training, doing a new drill that I haven't done before. As I was practicing the routine, one of the Black Belts came up to me and said 'relax' and I'm thinking "I am relaxed". So I thought I had better relax more. What was he talking about? How can you relax when you are trying to fight, how can you relax when you are trying to fight for your life, how can you relax when you are under pressure? Under intense pressure you do need to relax, you need to relax so much so that you can actually deliver your technique at high speed and effectively. On the other hand, when you are tense and all tight, it is actually harder to deliver a technique and your reactions are slower. One of the biggest challenges I had in flying an aircraft was to relax when I was coming in to land. Just like when you jump into your car as a learner driver and hold the steering wheel really tight at first, and you have sore arms. Once you are a bit more experienced you start to loosen up and your hands are a little bit looser on the steering wheel and it's not that hard to drive when you are relaxed but it is quite hard to drive when you are tense and the same with an aircraft when you are coming in to land. If you are tense you tend to push the controls down too hard, you pull back too hard; the plane takes about 2 - 3 second to react to your control so you tend to do jerky movements and it takes time for the plane to react, so the plane reacts and then you are jerking the other way to try and correspond, you are pushing down too hard and it takes a while for the plane starts to go down so you pull back, and the plane slows down so you give more power and flatten it out, so it just goes round and round and round. By relaxing, you are controlling it and anticipating what is going to happen next through controls. I went in a motor racing competition once and Racing Car Driver Alan Grice was talking about relaxing under pressure and that when you are trying to do your best lap you are not 100% focused you are actually about 80%-90% focused on the task with about 10% allowing for learning mode if you like - learning about what's going on around you in the environment. It was really easy to tell the people who were relaxed when they were coming down the main straight as they take one of their hands off the steering wheel to change gears and if you saw the car flinch at all, it meant they had too much pressure on the steering wheel and when they took their hand off the car flinches a bit. Alan Said that it was the people who were relaxed that do the best lap times. My brother used to be a jockey and he said the same thing about riding a race-horse - it is important to stay relaxed on the horse and not pull on its bit too much. Enough about sport - what about in relationships? How do you relax enough and I don't mean relax so much that they go and do what they like - how do you stay relaxed enough to get what you want in the situation the way you want without over reacting without over controlling, without making the life around you a living hell? What I found is typically if you are getting angry and up-tight in a situation, you need to figure out ways to relax and figure out ways to coerce them to do what you want them to do without over-reacting, being up-tight or tense. All this is possible once you understand the mindset of what it is you want to achieve. With about 80% focus, you can think about alternative strategies to anger escalation, such as joking, changing the subject, or getting the person to 'say back' without parroting. People become tense because of anticipation of 1) Pain, 2) Loss of control, 3) Embarrassment, 4) Financial ruin, 5) Death (but let's just leave that one alone!) Ok, there are probably more but let's leave it at that for now. In martial arts, I think about loosening my muscles, particularly during the technique. Flying was a lot harder because you can't just loosen up too much otherwise you might splat all over the runway! The way you learn to relax under pressure is to practice at about 80% of your maximum agility for 80% of the time or at least 3000 repetitions. By this time the technique is then patterned and becomes a 'reflex' reaction. If you practice 3000 times tense, then you will pattern yourself to tense behavior and it is challenging to change patterned reflexes. What I found is typically if you are getting angry and up-tight in a situation, you need to figure out ways to relax and figure out ways to coerce them to do what you want them to do without over-reacting, being up-tight or tense. All this is possible once you understand the mindset of what it is you want to achieve. With about 80% focus, you can think about alternative strategies to anger escalation, such as joking, changing the subject, or getting the person to 'say back' without parroting. I am teaching my children 4 different ways to respond to yelling and screaming. They have already patterned themselves to automatically respond by escalation of aggressiveness but firstly if they are 100% focused on the argument; they may not consider 3 valid alternatives. Relaxing under this situation does not mean giving up, quitting or conceding defeat. The first is to 'say back' what the other person is saying, without parroting. It doesn't mean that you agree with it but it sends a clear message to the yeller that you understand them. The second is to change the subject. My wife is particularly good at this as a reflex to either answer the question she wants to answer instead of what was asked. Also off reflex, she responds with something I have done wrong when I criticize her. So the subject is now about me not her. Another change of subject might be something else all together The final technique is to make a joke or to tell a joke. This could be to point and laugh ("you want me to do what?"). An alternative to road rage might be to make a joke of another driver, rather than escalating the situation. All of these techniques revolve around staying in control and remaining relaxed and responding quickly to stimulus. Each needs to be practiced at least 3000 times so in our family we are working towards that goal. When I have faced financial ruin, there was an intense fear to call my creditors and to make arrangements to pay. A big deal of that fear was totally unjustified. I decided to prioritize what was important to me and I made it clear to my family that they were more important to me than all of my financial possessions and that family relationships, general health and fitness are more important than the material things. If you are stressed about a financial decision, don't just consider the risk of a certain course of action. Also consider the risk of not taking that action, because sometimes the risk of doing nothing far outweighs the risk of doing something.

## About the Author

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