

Speech

I am a member of "Talk of the Town" Gavel Club. It is a subsidiary of Toastmasters International. This organization helps me to achieve educational, leadership and personal growth. What follows is a speech I wrote to present to the club. I hope you enjoy it.

Stress

Good evening fellow Gavel Club members. I want to talk to you tonight about stress. It is a part of everyone's life. How we cope with it is often the difference between success and failure.

I will share with you some of my own experiences. I hope you are encouraged to examine how stress can enhance your life. It does not have to be a source of defeat. It can be the very ally you need to reach your goals.

This topic is important to me because I have a disease that is triggered by stress. Contrary to popular belief, I found that avoiding it failed to provide me with a healthier life. In fact I learned that trying to do so was futile. The only course of action left to me was to manage it.

I was very active and goal oriented in my mid twenties. I worked long hours. In addition to them I attended a local junior college and trained for a sport. I was in a stressful relationship that lasted a couple of years. Although I encountered many difficulties, it looked like I was headed for success.

I sometimes struggled with depression but worked through it. My answer to it was to stay active.

My world began to unravel. There were signs I was in trouble. I failed to acknowledge them. I thought if I worked harder everything would turn out okay.

Occasionally I got injured while training. I started to enjoy these times because it meant I could slow down until I healed. Obviously I was doing too much. It was only a matter of time until my mind snapped.

I began to think people were watching me. I just knew they were talking about me. My mind became clouded with bizarre thoughts. I believed there were plots against me. I was hearing voices no-one else could. They tormented me day and night.

I got a new girlfriend and the symptoms mellowed for a couple of months. Then they became even worse. The woman's demands on my time added to my stress. She left town while I became ever more delusional.

The voices were threatening to kill everyone I knew. I remember driving wildly around the city one night. I was trying to protect my friends from these illusions. I ended the night back at home. I shot holes in the ceiling because I thought people were trying to get me.

I was hospitalized shortly after that night. I recall being on a psychiatric ward and thinking all the other patients were actors. I claimed to be unable to remember anything because I thought the doctors worked for the government. I believed they would have those I cared about killed. To me it seemed wise to avoid admitting to knowing anyone or anything.

In the following years I slowly let go of my ambitions. I went through a repeated pattern. I became psychotic for a time. When I regained my sanity I spent months functioning in a diminished capacity. As I regained my momentum the stress I encountered increased. These challenges led to the next episode of severe illness. Each time I experienced this cycle I did less after rebounding. In this way I tried to prevent its reoccurrence.

Eventually I reached a point where I was free of psychosis. I ended up on welfare and then Social Security. My life was as stress free as I could make it. What was left to me was a shell of an existence. My social life disintegrated. My routine revolved around watching television and surfing the internet. Days went by without contact with people. I got to where I thought: If this is all I have in life why is it worth living?

This question led to a difficult decision. I chose to begin to apply myself once again. I did have another mental breakdown. However, it was my last one. For twelve years I learned a little at a time about withstanding stress. It was and continues to be a challenge.

Managing stress has many rewards. Today I have a productive and useful life. I get to experience excitement and joy as I set and achieve goals. It is sometimes difficult.

Stress is ever present. I am careful to limit my activities. I avoid overwhelming myself with too much at once. There are checks and balances in my life. They help me cope. I am closely monitored by mental health professionals. I also have a strong support system among my friends.

Stress becomes useful when properly managed. It gives me a sense of my limitations. Thus it causes me to make quality decisions. I weigh out how I spend my time, use my energy and apply my resources. Furthermore, it often gives me a boost of energy or focuses my attention to accomplish particular tasks.

Stress is a vital part of leading a successful life. I hope that after hearing my experience you now have a new outlook on its value and purpose in your life. Please join me in accepting it as an element in our achievements. It should no longer be disdained but embraced. If I can learn to manage it so can you.

Patrick Rathsack T-45624
M.C.S.P. C-14-232 low
P.O. Box 409060
IONE, CA. 95640