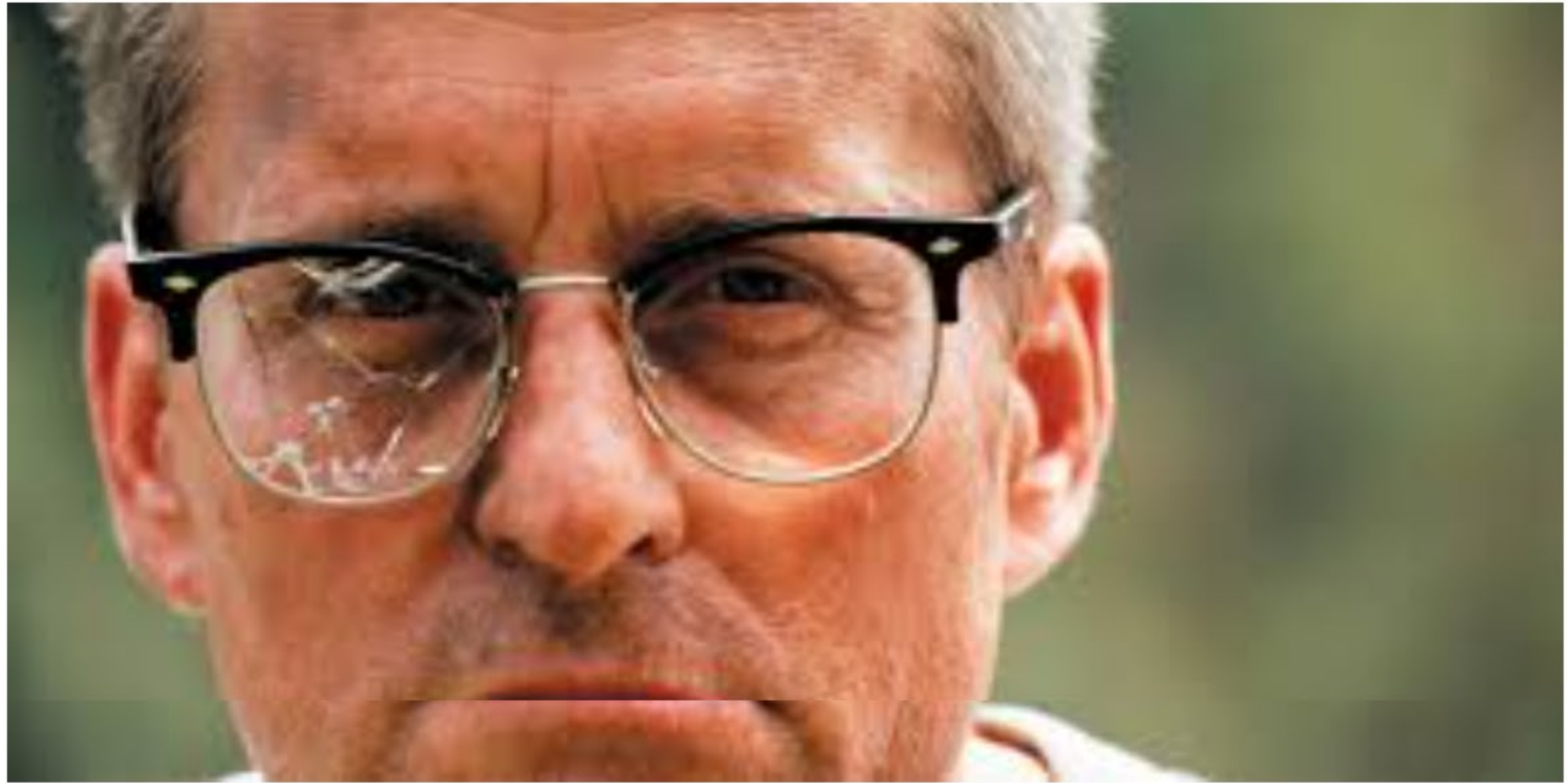


TEN BUSINESS STRESS BUSTERS YOU NEED TO KNOW



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Resilient and agile **as they are**, the past year has taken a huge toll on the 2.3 million small businesses in Australia, with two thirds (**66 per cent**) admitting the pandemic has impacted mental wellbeing. With the everyday pressures of running a business exacerbated by the pandemic, it is vital to manage stress.



The challenge is that our brains were developed thousands of years ago and haven’t been updated: they haven’t had their IOS systems upgrade, so-to-speak. This means they still can’t differentiate between life threatening stress and the stress brought about by everyday worries. Our bodies will react exactly the same way whether a sabre-toothed tiger is about to attack or whether we’re not sure we can pay the bills this month: our stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) spike, our blood pressure and heart rate crank up and we become agitated and restless.

This finely-tuned natural alarm system can be extremely effective when we really do need a burst of energy to escape danger, but when we are experiencing it every day it **becomes detrimental** to our mental and physical health.

Although our brains (our hardware) can’t be upgraded, our minds (our software) can and this can help us to better manage stress by helping us to remain calm in the face of challenge. Here are 10 ways to upgrade our mental software:

- viii. **Breathing** Simply breathing slowly, through the nose and into the belly activates our parasympathetic response (the opposite of the stress response). Breathing well also lowers blood pressure, reduces anxiety, depression and headaches and improves our capacity to cope with daily pressures.
- ix. **Digital wellbeing** Digital Wellbeing involves limiting the time we spend on devices so that tech improves, not diminishes, the quality of our lives. Simple ways to reclaim our time include switching off notifications, banning our phones from the bedroom, taking regular digital detoxes and tracking app usage and screen time.
- x. **Nature/grounding:** On multiple fronts – from mental health, to sharpening brain function, feeling greater emotional clarity, reducing cortisol levels and socialising better – nature has the power to heal. So however you can, get into it. Literally. Stand, barefoot on the grass, swim in the sea, walk in the bush, exercise outdoors, spend time in the garden or work by a window where you can see nature.
- xi. **Restorative sleep:** Sleep allows the body’s cells to repair and rejuvenate. Many of the restorative functions in the body – including muscle growth, tissue repair, protein synthesis, and growth hormone release – occur mostly during sleep. Sleep also makes us more mentally alert, happier and better able to cope with stress.
- xii. **Fun, laughter and play:** Play and regular doses of fun keep us healthy and young at heart. Recreational play also generates optimism, is the gateway to vitality, enhances relationships and boosts learning.
- xiii. **Get organised with a Better Week:** Prioritise what is most important to you. Then take control by locking activities that are most important to you into your diary each week. Plan fitness activities, time with loved ones and all-important self-care.
- xiv. **Gratitude:** Gratitude – the act of appreciating the good in life – is a powerful practice that boosts the feel-good neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin and the hormone oxytocin. It can improve our relationships, enhance recovery from illness, foster resilience, boost self-esteem and our sense of wellbeing, and even improve sleep.
- xv. **Journaling:** The act of putting pen to paper (or fingers to keypad) helps us clarify our thoughts and feelings, provides an opportunity for positive self-talk, and offers tangible evidence that moments which seem insignificant really do matter.
- xvi. **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness can apply to any activity – from drinking a glass of wine to brushing our teeth, from eating a meal to communicating. The benefits of paying attention to what we are doing in any given moment, noticing how we are doing it and any of the sensations around it, include decreased reactivity, improved emotional regulation and satisfaction and better adaptation to stress.
- xvii. **Triggers:** We can use habit “triggers” to implement better habits and a more positive mindset. Try using heightened stress as a trigger to pause and complete a breathing exercise (**try box breathing**) or try setting a timer every 60-90 minutes as a trigger to stop work for a moment, drink a glass of water, go for a short walk or have a stretch.