STRESS INTELLIGENCE™

Pressure Is Not the Enemy

A field-tested reframe for the moments that feel impossible, plus one tool you can use today.

By Colonel Deb Lewis, USA (Ret.)



When life gets overwhelming, it's natural to think: If I could just get through this, things would settle down.

Then something else happens.

A difficult conversation. A family emergency. A deadline that moves closer while the help you expected falls through.

Waiting for life to become easier can leave us postponing the very preparation that would help us handle it.

Across more than thirty years in the Army, including leading reconstruction work in combat, I learned to prepare for demanding situations. That lesson has continued through caregiving, community leadership, and the personal challenges that arrive without warning.

We cannot predict every difficulty. We can develop our ability to meet what happens next.

That is central to what I teach through Stress Intelligence™.

Prepare for the pressure life brings

Consider how much preparation goes into any demanding responsibility.

We train people to lead teams, respond to emergencies, and make decisions with incomplete information. Practice gives them something to draw on when the situation gets difficult.

Our everyday reactions deserve preparation, too.

How do you respond when someone criticizes you? When plans unravel? When you're tired and one more person needs your attention?

Those moments can affect your relationships, your work, and how you feel about yourself long after the immediate pressure passes.

My goal is to help women handle more stress while holding onto their wisdom, values, relationships, and joy.

That includes knowing when to ask for help, change a commitment, or step away from a harmful situation. Handling stress well involves making thoughtful choices about what you carry and how you carry it.

Decide what you want to happen next

Under pressure, it's easy to focus entirely on what someone said or did.

How could they treat me that way? Why does this always happen? They need to understand how wrong they are.

Meanwhile, the opportunity to influence what happens next is slipping away.

One question I've shared in my BiteSize Moments is:

Is it more important to be right or make things better?

That question can help bring your desired outcome back into view.

You may need to address unacceptable behavior. You may need to correct an error or hold someone accountable. How you do that can either support your purpose or create another problem to solve.

Before you answer, give yourself a chance to remember what matters.

Use the Waterfall Breathing 10-Second Stress Reset

I teach Waterfall Breathing as a practical way to interrupt a stressful moment and bring your attention back to your response.

Here's how to practice:

Keep your eyes open. Notice what is happening around you.

Gently inhale through your nose for three seconds.

Slowly exhale through your mouth for seven seconds. Imagine a waterfall washing the tension away.

When you're learning, repeat this three times. As you become familiar with it, one ten-second breath may help you interrupt a reaction and choose your next step.

Then ask: What response will help make this situation better?

Perhaps you need to ask a question before reaching a conclusion. Perhaps you need to say, "I want to give this the attention it deserves. Let's come back to it after I've had a moment."

Perhaps the most useful action is to listen.

The situation may still be difficult. You've created a chance to bring more of your wisdom to it.

Practice before the difficult moment

Try Waterfall Breathing during an ordinary frustration: waiting for a page to load, running behind schedule, or noticing tension before a conversation.

Practice helps make the tool familiar enough to remember when you need it.

Pressure will continue to be part of a meaningful life. We care about people. We take on responsibilities. We pursue things that matter, even when the outcome is uncertain.

Stress Intelligence™ helps us prepare for those moments so we can keep contributing with clarity, confidence, and heart.

Before stress hijacks your reaction, take ten seconds to reset—and choose your response.

Get my FREE 10-Second Stress Reset Guide and begin practicing today.