STRESS SMARTS

Three Tools for the Overwhelmed Giver

For the women who hold everything together for everyone else—a lesson in filling your own cup first.

By Colonel Deb Lewis, USA (Ret.)



You're the one people call when something goes wrong.

You notice what needs doing. You step in, figure things out, and find a way to help. You care deeply, and people count on you.

Somewhere in all that giving, your own needs keep getting pushed to tomorrow.

Then one more request arrives. You hear the irritation in your voice. Your patience disappears. You love these people, yet you're struggling to enjoy being around them.

Those moments deserve your attention. Your needs belong in the picture, too.

Through decades of military leadership, community service, and caregiving, I've learned how easily meaningful responsibilities can consume the energy we need to meet them well.

Stress Intelligence™ includes recognizing when you're becoming depleted and taking action before that depletion starts making your choices for you.

Here are three tools to help you begin.

1. Reset before you answer

When someone needs something, you may say yes before you've considered what that yes will require.

Give yourself a moment to choose.

My Waterfall Breathing 10-Second Stress Reset is a simple place to start:

Keep your eyes open.

Gently inhale through your nose for three seconds.

Slowly exhale through your mouth for seven seconds.

Imagine a waterfall washing away the tension you're carrying.

When you're learning, practice three rounds. With practice, a single ten-second breath may help you pause and pay attention.

Then ask yourself: What can I offer and still take care of my responsibilities—including myself?

Sometimes you can help now. Sometimes you can offer a smaller contribution. Sometimes your answer might be, "Let me look at what I've already committed to and get back to you."

That pause gives your wisdom a chance to participate.

2. Put something strengthening back into your day

In my R.I.S.E. teaching, the "I" reminds us to intake what strengthens us.

That includes water, nourishing food, rest, helpful words, music, and the people whose company leaves us feeling more like ourselves.

What have you been running low on?

Perhaps you've been skipping lunch, postponing sleep, or putting off the walk that helps you clear your head. Perhaps every conversation lately has been about a problem, and you miss laughing with a friend.

Choose one thing that strengthens you and make room for it today. Be specific: eat lunch before the next meeting, step outside for ten minutes, or call someone you enjoy.

Your ability to contribute draws on what you have available. Replenishing yourself deserves a place on your calendar alongside the people and causes you serve.

3. Give someone else the opportunity to help

Receiving can feel surprisingly uncomfortable when you're used to being the capable one.

You may find yourself saying, "I'm fine," while wishing someone would notice how much you're carrying.

In The Go-Giver, Bob Burg and John David Mann describe the Law of Receptivity: "The key to effective giving is to stay open to receiving." thegogiver.com

For women accustomed to helping everyone else, that principle invites a practical question: Am I allowing anyone to help me?

Try making one clear request:

"Could you take care of dinner tonight?"

"Would you handle these calls?"

"Could you listen for a few minutes? I need to talk this through."

Let the person know what would help. Give them room to follow through without requiring them to do everything exactly as you would.

You know how meaningful it feels to make a difference for someone you care about. Allow others to experience that with you.

Include yourself in the care you give

You can love your family, believe in your mission, and feel grateful for your life while also needing rest and support.

Start with one reset, one strengthening choice, and one opportunity to receive.

The people you love matter. So do you.

For a simple place to begin, get my FREE 10-Second Stress Reset Guide and practice before your next stressful moment.