



Guide for Coaches

Workout 6

DISTINGUISHING GOOD STRESS AND DISTRESS

Developing a Stress-Resilient Team Culture



**SPORT TEAM
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THE WORKOUT FOCUS

Teams pursuing challenging and worthy goals will typically experience a great deal of stress. Without some **good stress** there can be no growth in strength, endurance, and grit—the assets needed for achieving lofty goals. But there is a tipping point where good stress becomes **distress**, leading to physical, mental, and emotional breakdowns that undermine growth and threaten team goals. Awareness and understanding of stress within a safe and supportive community develops the capacity needed to summit safely.

This workout prepares teams to distinguish good stress and the tipping point where it becomes distress. Through shared understanding and dialogue around the causes of and productive responses to stress, team members will understand that their stress experiences are shared by most and are something that can be discussed safely as a team. The goal is not to create a *stress-free* team culture—rather, it is to create a **stress-resilient** culture so that teams can pursue their goals with confidence, joy, unity, and safety.

Strengths of Culture Targeted:

- Developing strong stress response to support positive mental health.
- Creating high-performance team culture that is safe and supportive.
- Creating a resilient team culture that is prepared to productively handle high pressure situations.

Strengths of Character Developed:

Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Emotional Intelligence, Resilience, Psychological Safety, Unity, Solidarity, Teamwork.



KNOW.

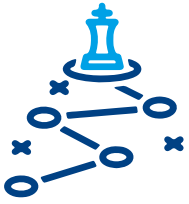
Review the essential knowledge needed for this workout:



Main Points:

- Stress is normal and natural, and helps improve human performance. But too much stress for too long leads to breakdown.
- High-performing coaches and teams aim to be around the tipping point. This requires monitoring, discussing, and adjusting to avoid distress.
- Stress is cumulative and can transfer to others, but good stress can be used to our advantage through productive responses.

My Notes:



PLAN.

Review implementation insights and make your plan:



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MAKING A PLAN

Distinguishing Good Stress and Distress

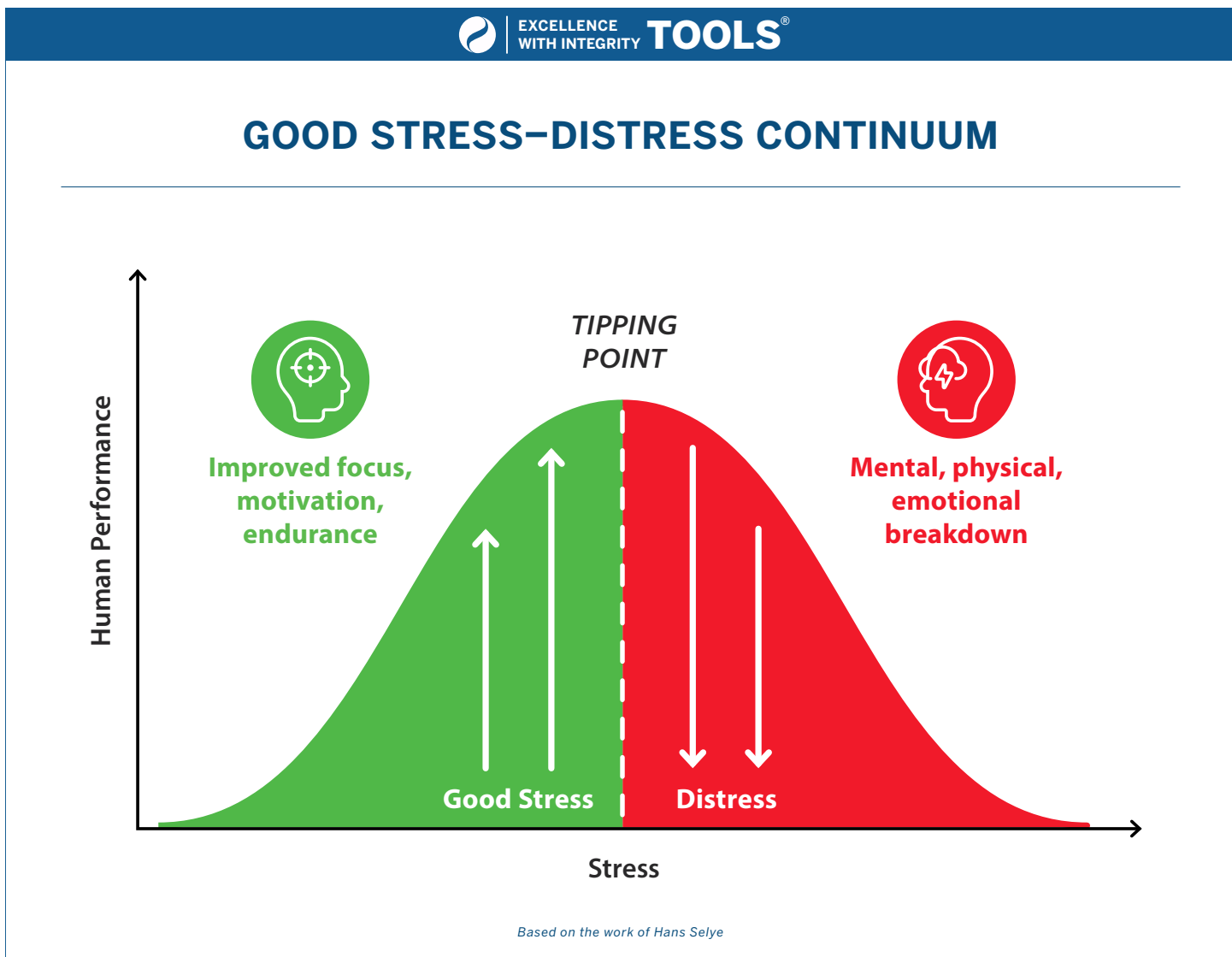
Matt Davidson, Ph.D., President
Excellence with Integrity Institute

My Workout Plan:



DO THE WORKOUT.

1. Introduce the Good Stress-Distress Continuum.



Share a brief overview of the core ideas presented in the Excellence with Integrity Good Stress-Distress Continuum.

- ▶ While we often think about stress as something bad, stress is normal, natural, and even helpful. Good stress is needed to strengthen our muscles and improve our focus, endurance, and persistence.

- ▶ There is a tipping point where good stress becomes distress that leads to physical, mental, and emotional breakdown.
- ▶ High-performing teams seek to be around the tipping point to maximize gains. So, it is important to develop strategies to both extend times of good stress and respond effectively to distress.
- ▶ Distress becomes more painful when we suffer in isolation. Dialogue in the team culture, then, is essential to develop harmony within and unity between team members.

2. As a team, identify what Good Stress and Distress look, sound, and feel like.

In this exercise, team members will learn the distinction between good stress and distress. In reflecting together, they will also come to understand that stress experiences can feel unique, but are a shared and common human experience.

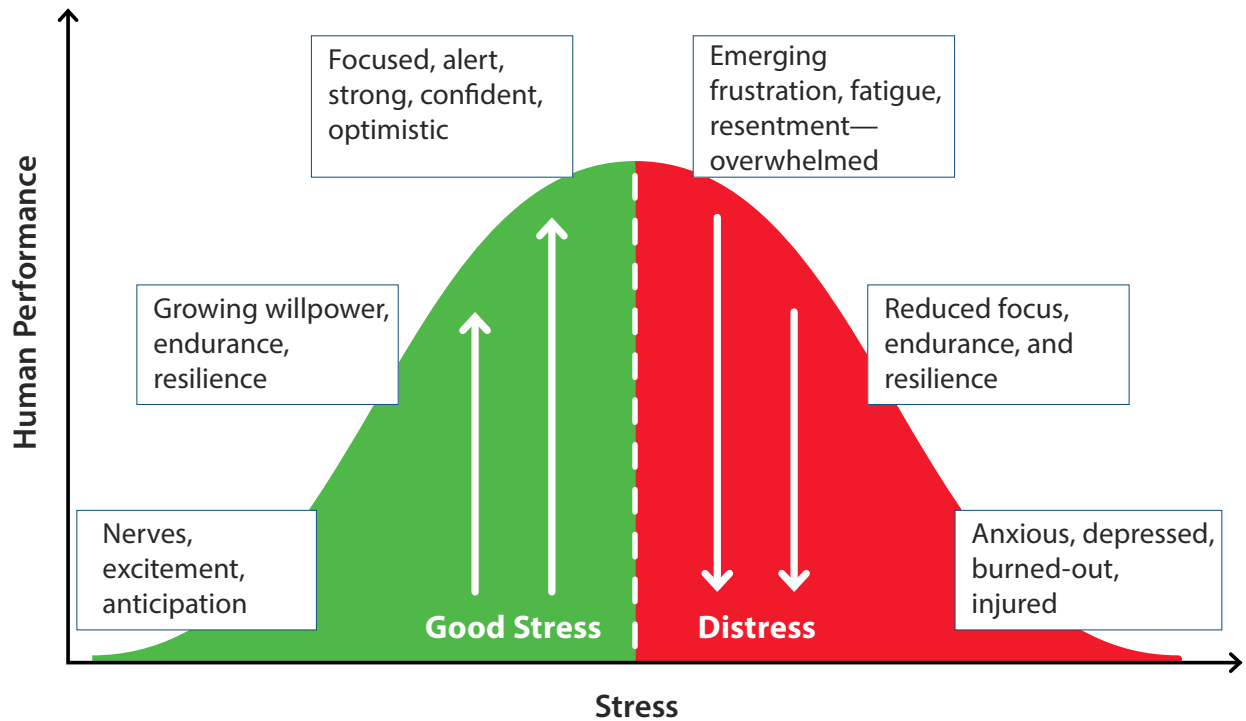
In pairs, small groups, or as a whole group, team members will identify examples of the following.

- ▶ **Good stress:** positive stress responses that increase focus, motivation, and endurance.
- ▶ **Distress:** negative stress responses where they are past the productive tipping point and see physical, mental, and emotional breakdown.
- ▶ **Tipping point:** signs and symptoms of experiences that push them to distress.

Optional: Share the following Good Stress–Distress Continuum Example as a final summary.

GOOD STRESS–DISTRESS CONTINUUM EXAMPLE

Select the box below that indicates where you are on the continuum and describe the signs in yourself, your relationships, and your performance that support your assessment.



Based on the work of Hans Selye

COACHING POINT:

If time is limited, this is a logical place to split the workout into two parts. Break the workout here and have the team observe good stress and distress patterns within themselves and the team to prepare for the follow-up. Continue steps below as a follow-up workout.

3. Distinguish Productive and Unproductive Responses to stress.

In pairs, small groups, or as a whole group, have team members reflect on their own experiences and brainstorm the following.

- ▶ **Productive Responses:** positive ways to use the stressors they will inevitably experience.
- ▶ **Unproductive Responses:** responses that contribute to distress and breakdown.



PRODUCTIVE STRESS RESPONSES

We can learn to have *better responses* and *quicker adjustments*.

UNPRODUCTIVE RESPONSES

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick red border, intended for listing unproductive stress responses.

PRODUCTIVE RESPONSES

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick green border, intended for listing productive stress responses.

Summarize the group discussions with a master list of Productive Responses to practice and Unproductive Responses to avoid (or share the example provided below).

EXAMPLE

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PRODUCTIVE STRESS RESPONSES

We can learn to have *better responses* and *quicker adjustments*.

UNPRODUCTIVE RESPONSES

- » Hoping it won't happen
- » Pretending it isn't happening
- » Suffering in isolation
- » Eating poorly
- » Neglecting sleep
- » Escaping with technology and/or social media

PRODUCTIVE RESPONSES

- » Visualization
- » Creating aligned expectations
- » Focused breathing
- » Positive mantras
- » Clearing the decks before
- » Sharing the scaries after



COACHING POINTS:

- *It may be helpful to provide a Coaches' List of Productive and Unproductive responses to assure the team that coaches are intentionally working to create a culture for and with the team that is stress-resilient. See example below.*
- *Refer to the [Team Skills Development: Good Stress and Distress](#) video for additional insights on how to intentionally shape the habits and mindsets needed for mastering positive stress responses.*

COACHES' EXAMPLE**PRODUCTIVE STRESS RESPONSES**

We can learn to have *better responses* and *quicker adjustments*.

UNPRODUCTIVE RESPONSES

- » Hoping it won't happen
- » Ignoring
- » Blaming
- » Shaming
- » Complaining

PRODUCTIVE RESPONSES

- » Making time for skill development around:
 - ◇ Visualization in advance
 - ◇ Creating aligned expectations
 - ◇ Practicing focused breathing
 - ◇ Positive mantras
 - ◇ Clearing the decks before
 - ◇ Sharing the scaries after
- » Making adjustments
- » Ongoing communication

4. Create opportunities to regularly reflect on stress management within the team.

Stress management is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. The included Stress Response Self-Study is a valuable tool for regularly checking in with team members. This reflection process provides insight into adjustments that are needed and skills that can be strengthened.

COACHING POINTS:

- *Intentionally inform parents about good stress and distress so that they know what to look for, and encourage them to reach out if they observe unhealthy patterns.*
- *Use the quotes provided to reinforce key pieces of wisdom to guide thinking and actions around productive management of stress.*

WORKOUT COMPLETE!

**REFLECT.**

Workout Praise/Polish: What went well. Things to do better or differently when you do this workout in the future with a *different team*.

Monitor & Strengthen: Plans for monitoring, adjusting, and revisiting these strengths of culture and character *during this season*.

Future Timing: Plans on timing for introducing and reinforcing this workout *next season*.

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About the Consortium

Almost two decades ago, the Excellence with Integrity Institute and The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, created a consortium partnership to advance our respective visions and missions. Together, we pursue strategic opportunities in youth leadership, employment readiness, athletics, education, and organizational development in community and workplace environments.

The Institute's main focus is on research and development of instructional and assessment tools and strategies that help leaders shape culture, build character, and achieve optimal performance.

The Ray Center's main focus is on coaching, training, and expanding our collaborative implementation projects across Iowa and around the globe.