

The Hidden Cost of Excellence: Perfectionism, Stress and Performance in Female Tax Professionals

ANGELA INE FRANK-BRIGGS

PROFESSOR OF PAEDIATRIC NEUROLOGY AND
NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT,
UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT.

Role of Tax Professionals

Tax Compliance and planning

- Prepare and file accurate tax returns
- Ensure adherence to tax laws and regulations
- Avoid penalties, fines, or legal issues
- Advise on how to legally reduce tax burden
- Structure income, investments, and transactions efficiently
- Plan ahead for future tax obligations

Advisory & Consultancy

- Provide expert guidance on financial decisions
- Interpret complex tax regulations
- Help clients understand tax implications of business actions

Role of Tax Professionals

- **Audit and Representation**

- Represent clients during tax audits or disputes
- Defend positions using proper documentation and law

- **Record Keeping & Documentation**

- Maintain proper financial and tax records
- Ensure transparency and accountability

- **Regulatory Updates**

- Stay updated with changing tax laws and policies
- Educate clients on new developments

- **In Summary**

Tax professionals are they are strategic advisors, compliance guardians, and key partners in financial success.”

Opening Reflection

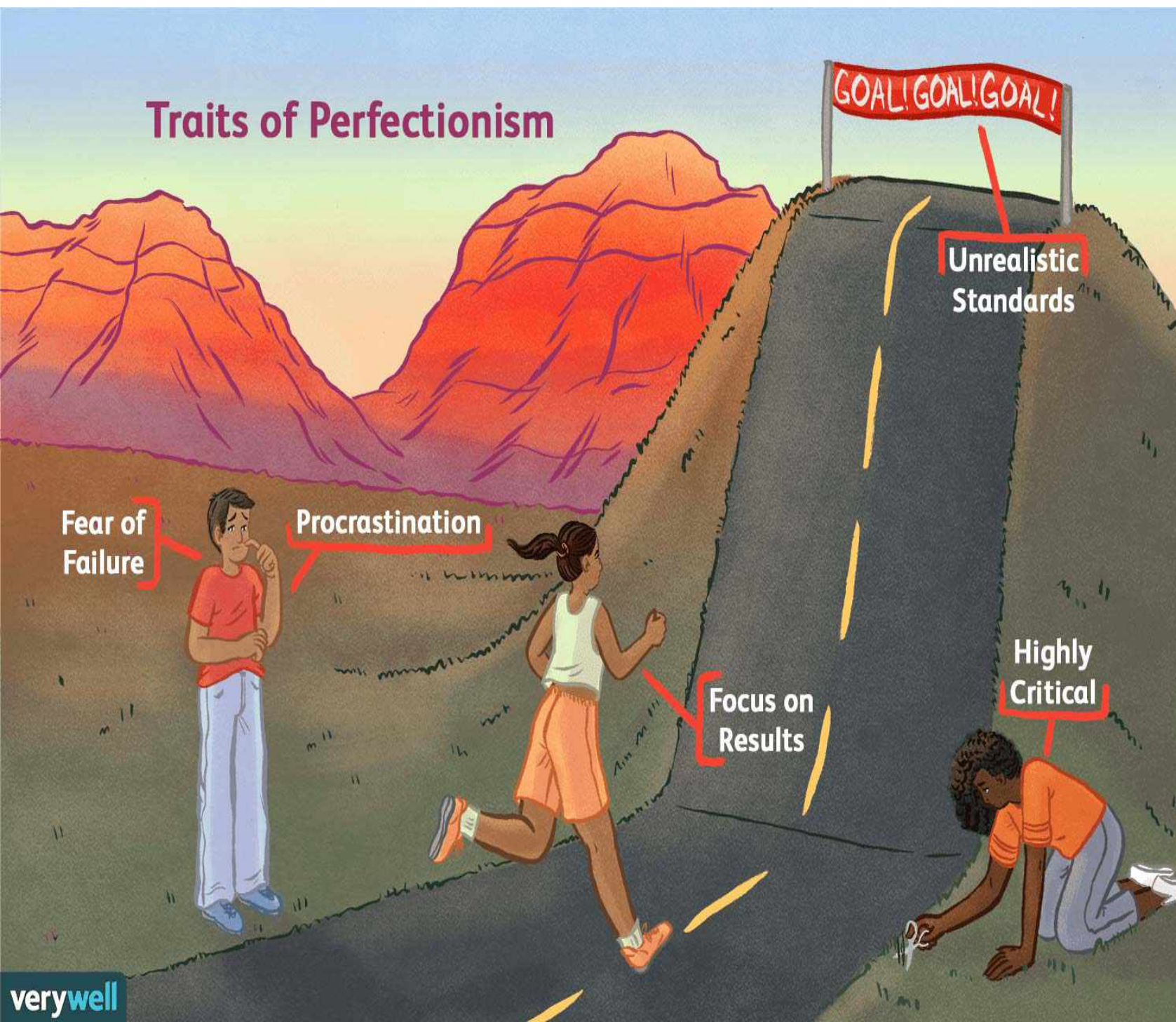
- **Excellence** means consistently performing at a **very high standard**, going beyond what is average or expected
- Excellence is admired and rewarded in professional spaces
- Tax professionals are expected to be precise, accurate, and reliable, integrity, have growth mind-set
- However, behind consistent excellence often lies invisible pressure

Excellence

- Excellence means:
- Delivering accurate, reliable work
- Meeting deadlines
- Maintaining ethical standards
- Continuously updating knowledge
- Providing value to clients and society



What is Perfectionism?



- **Perfectionism** is the tendency to set **extremely high, often unrealistic standards** for yourself and to feel dissatisfied or anxious when those standards are not perfectly met.
- Setting extremely high standards
- Fear of making mistakes
- Self-worth tied to performance

Gender and Perfectionism

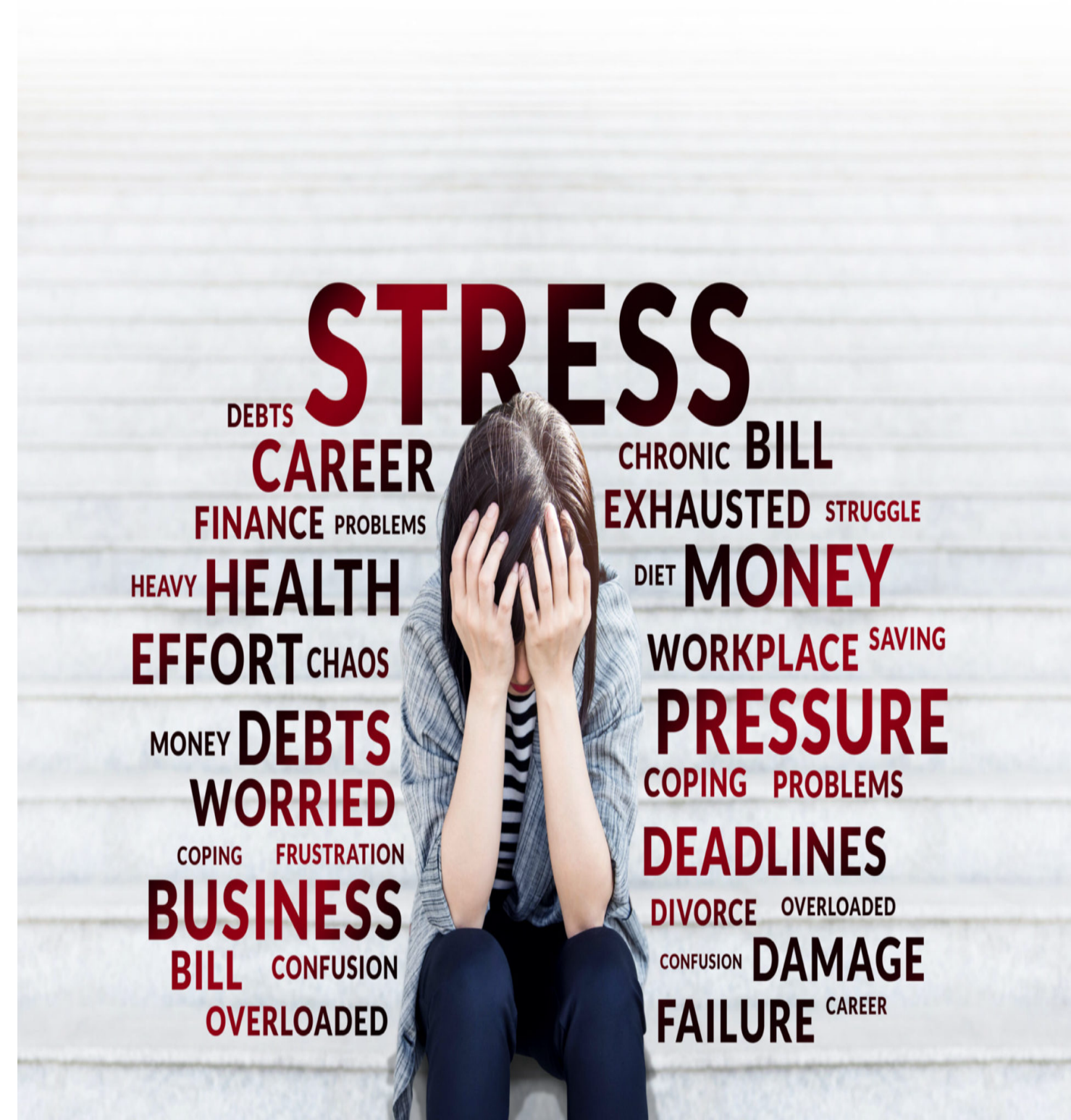
- Women often feel the need to prove competence
- Fear of being judged more harshly
- Balancing career, family, and societal expectations

Nature of the Tax Profession

- High attention to detail required
- Strict compliance with laws and regulations
- Deadlines with serious financial implications
- Constant updates in tax policies

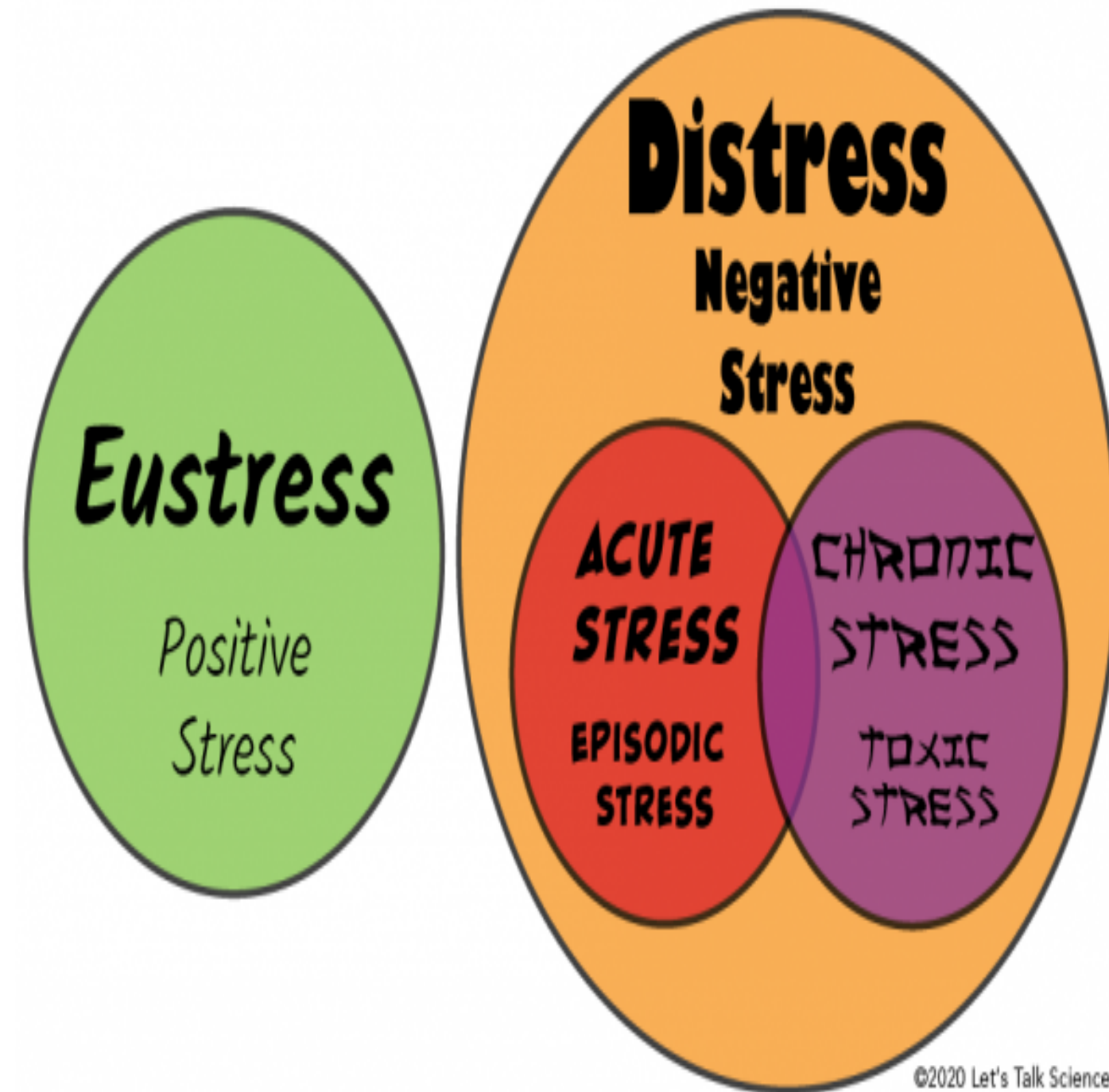
Understanding Stress

- Stress is the body's response to pressure and demand
- Can be short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic)
- **What Happens During Stress**
- When you experience stress:
- Your body releases stress hormones (like adrenaline and cortisol)
- Your heart rate increases
- Your mind becomes alert
- 🙌 This is often called the “**fight or flight**” response



Types of Stress

- ◆ **1. Positive Stress (Eustress)** It is beneficial stress that motivates you, improves performance, and helps you grow.
 - Motivates you to perform better
 - Example: preparing for a presentation or deadline, Handling an urgent client issue
- ◆ **2. Negative Stress (Distress)** It is harmful stress that overwhelms you and affects your wellbeing.
 - Fear of failure or perfectionism
 - Excessive workload and tight deadlines
 - Work-life imbalance



Understanding Stress

- Stress is the body's response to pressure and demand
- Can be short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic)

- **What Happens During Stress**
- When you experience stress:
- Your body releases stress hormones (like adrenaline and cortisol)
- Your heart rate increases
- Your mind becomes alert
- 🙌 This is often called the **“fight or flight”** response

Stress Levels

- Eustress

- Positive stress
- Meeting challenges and difficulties
- Expectation of achievement
- Energizing and motivating

- Distress

- Negative stress
- Physiological and psychological problems
- Feel irritable
- Sleeping difficulties
- No joy out of life
- Appetite is disturbed
- Relationship problems

Acute vs Chronic Stress

- **Acute Stress (Short-Term)**

- *Stress that comes suddenly and lasts for a short period.*

- **Examples:**

- Preparing for a tax audit or deadline
- Speaking at a conference
- Handling an urgent client issue
- Sitting for an exam or interview
- Usually resolves once the situation passes

- **Chronic Stress (Long-Term)**

- *Stress that persists over a long period and becomes harmful.*

- **Examples:**

- Constant heavy workload without rest
- Ongoing financial difficulties
- Long-term job pressure or dissatisfaction
- Balancing demanding career and family roles over time
- Can lead to serious health issues like hypertension, anxiety, and burnout

Effects of Chronic Stress

- Fatigue and burnout
- Reduced concentration
- Anxiety and irritability
- Physical symptoms (headaches, insomnia)



Effects of Chronic Stress

- Fatigue and burnout
- Reduced concentration
- Anxiety and irritability
- Physical symptoms (headaches, insomnia)

Redefining Excellence

- Excellence is not perfection
- Focus on progress, not flawlessness
- Accept that mistakes are part of growth

Important Considerations: Stress

- The level of stress experienced depends on *individual* reactions to a situation
- The source of stress, or *stressor*, can be either real or imagined.



Workplace Stress Defined

- **Stress**

- A feeling of tension that occurs when a person assesses that a given situation is about to exceed his or her ability to cope and consequently will endanger his or her well-being.

- **Job stress**

- The feeling that one's capabilities, resources, or needs do not match the demands of the job.

Sources of Stress in Tax Professionals

- Tight deadlines and filing seasons
- High client expectations
- Complex regulatory environment
- Long working hours

LEADERSHIP STRESS

Common Sources of Leadership Stress



Stress-Related Conditions

Exhibit 7-1

Some Stress-Related Conditions

Conditions that can result from chronic stress

Anxiety and panic attacks

Depression

Long-term disturbances in eating (anorexia or overeating)

Irritability

Lowered resistance to infection and disease

Diabetes

High blood pressure

Loss of sex drive

STRESS
MANAGEMENT



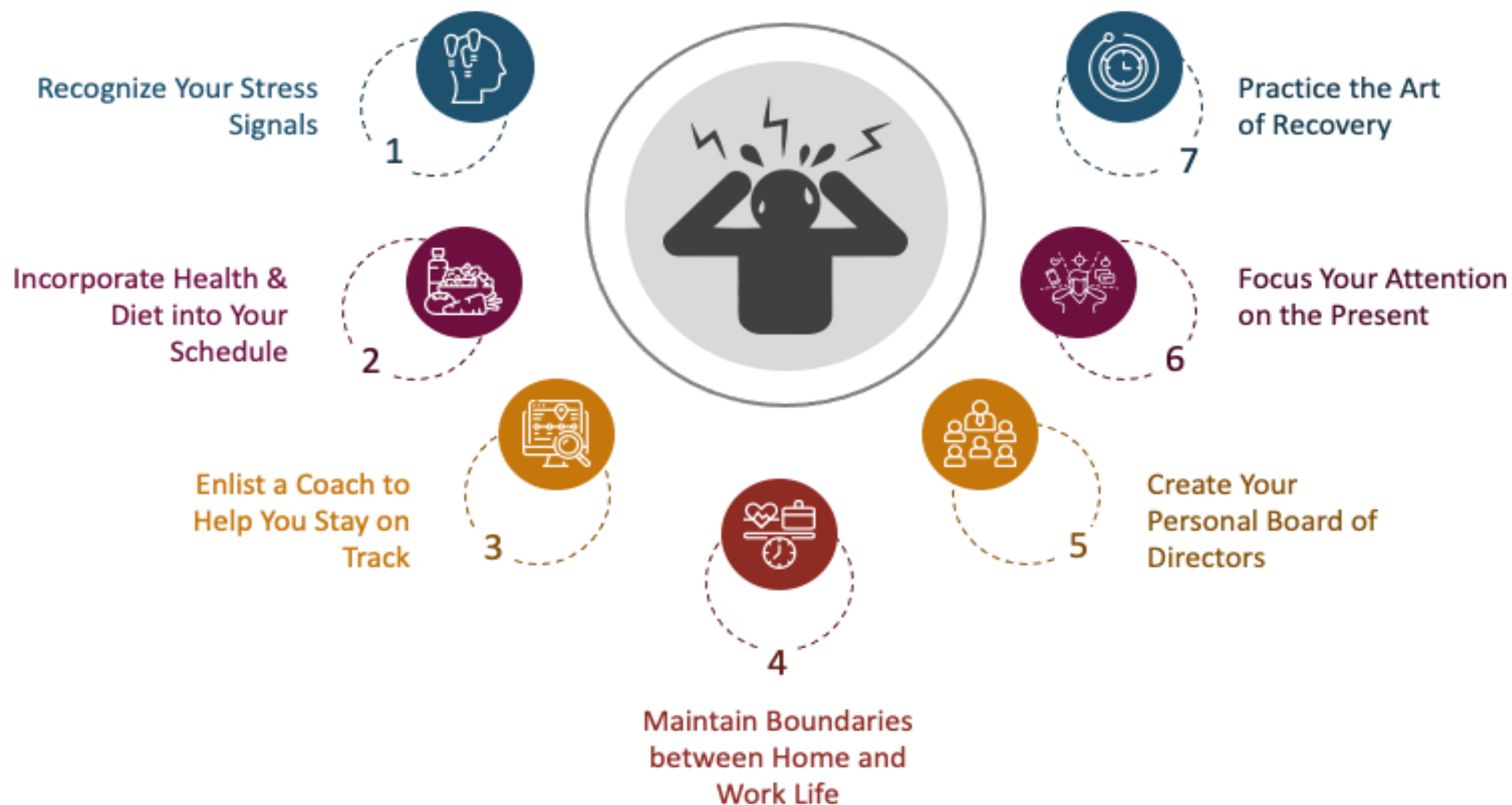
Stress Management Strategies

- Take regular breaks
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Maintain physical health



LEADERSHIP STRESS

Strategies for Combating Leadership Stress



Stress Management Strategies

- Take regular breaks
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Maintain physical health

LEADERSHIP STRESS

Some Ways to Manage Leadership Stress



Behavioural Techniques for Coping with Stress (1/3)

The following slide highlights the behavioral techniques for stress and time which includes lack of priorities, lack of planning, over commitment, too many meetings, haste and management by crisis with problems and solutions.



Workplace Time Wasters

Problems

Solutions

○ Lack of Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unclear goals and objectives ○ Getting distracted by little things ○ Add text here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plan priorities with team ○ Track weekly team goal ○ Add text here
○ Lack of Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fail day to day operations ○ Zero success in timely project delivery ○ Add text here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make short and long term plan ○ Change daily tasks according to plan ○ Add text here
○ Over Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Too many tasks ○ Confusion in priorities ○ Add text here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Say 'No" if required ○ Reschedule daily events ○ Add text here
○ Too Many Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of rational decision making ○ Mistake or Indecision ○ Add text here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discourage unnecessary meetings ○ Check facts then plan the meeting ○ Add Text Here
○ Haste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wrong decision making ○ Bad quality work ○ Carelessness in tasks ○ Add text here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Take time to plan ○ Delegate tasks to team ○ Add text here
○ Management By Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Add text here 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Add text here

Behavioural Techniques for Coping with Stress (2/3)

This slide highlights the behavioral techniques or strategies for coping with stress and negative thinking which includes negative thinking changes to positive thinking with their benefits.



Initial Frame (Negative Thinking)

- This tasks cannot be completed by today
- This person doesn't look confident enough to deal with tough situation
- Targets are not achieved every week
- Our clients are difficult to handle
- Management is very angry on the mistakes



Reframe (Positive Thinking)

- Try to complete this task by today only
- Develop confident by pushing limits with team trainings
- Check burden on team and assign tasks according to their limit
- Carefully listen the client requirements and try to built strength
- Learn and try to avoid same mistakes again



Positive Thinking Can Help in

- Minimized Stress
- Better coping skills
- Better physical well being
- Better cardiovascular health
- Add text here

Organizational and Work-Related Stressors

- Stressors
 - Environmental conditions that cause individuals to experience stress
 - Occupation
 - Work overload
 - Role conflict
 - Role ambiguity
 - Resource inadequacy
 - Working conditions
 - Management style
 - Monitoring
 - Job insecurity



Practical Coping Strategies

- **Set Boundaries**

- Learn to say no when necessary
- Protect personal time

- **Prioritize Self-Care**

- Sleep, nutrition, exercise are non-negotiable
- Mental health check-ins

- **Delegate & Collaborate**

- You don't have to carry everything alone

- **Manage Perfectionism**

- Accept “good enough” where appropriate

- **Build Support Systems**

- Mentorship
- Peer networks
- Family support

Practical Coping Strategies

- **Redefining Excellence**

Encourage a mindset shift:

- Excellence is not perfection
- Focus on progress, not flawlessness
- Accept that mistakes are part of growth
- From **perfection** → **progress**
- From **overwork** → **effectiveness**
- From **people-pleasing** → **value-driven performance**

“True excellence is sustainable, not self-destructive.”

- **Institutional Responsibility**

- Encourage organizations to:
- Promote flexible work policies
- Support mental health initiatives
- Recognize output—not just hours worked
- Create safe spaces for women to thrive

CONCLUSION

Ladies, as you go back to your offices, your clients, and your responsibilities, Carry this with you:

- *You are called to excellence—but not to exhaustion.*
- *Yes, the standards are high. Yes, the demands are real. But so is your strength, your capacity, and your value. You do not have to prove yourself by running on empty.*
- *Set your standards high—but set your boundaries higher. Do your work with excellence—but give yourself permission to rest, to grow, and to be human.*
- *Remember, mistakes do not define you, pressure should not control you, and success should not cost you your peace.*
- *So rise, lead, and excel—but do it with wisdom, with balance, and with strength.*
- *Because the true power of a woman is not just in how high she rises—but in how well she sustains her rise.”*
- *Remember that at the end of the day, the goal is not just to be excellent—but to remain whole while being excellent.”*



THANK YOU

FOR LISTENING