



# Enterprising Rural Families™

This newsletter is an instrument of the *Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work* program of the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service. For further information concerning the Enterprising Rural Families program or on-line course contact [information@eRuralFamilies.org](mailto:information@eRuralFamilies.org) or go to <http://eRuralFamilies.org/>.

## TIP OF THE MONTH:

### MORE MARKET RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Who are your strongest competitors and where are they located?
- Is their location a strength or a weakness?
- Summarize the key features and benefits of your strongest competitors.
- How do their products and services meet the needs of the consumer?
- What do they do well? How do you know this?
- How do their prices compare to yours?
- How will your products and services better meet the needs and wants of your customers?
- How are your products/services unique and different from those of the competition?
- What can you do better than your competitors—how do you know this?
- What are your key competitive advantages?

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## Learning to Relax

By Randolph R. Weigel, Extension Specialist  
University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service

*Roger holds down a job in town to supplement income from the family ranch. He is up before everyone else in the house on most days, and his schedule and lack of adequate sleep often have him feeling as if he does morning chores in a stupor. Although he is able to recognize stress signals, Roger sometimes feels powerless to address them. "There just isn't any extra time in my day," he says.*

Roger's statement about lack of time is probably all too familiar. Many people can relate to this feeling. What needs to be considered, however, is the time that stress eats away from each task. A work task that takes an hour when you are alert takes 90 minutes when you are battling stress and fatigue.



*Perhaps we should copy the practices of some animals, they have the secret of complete relaxation, and don't worry about how they look or if it's acceptable.*

Practicing relaxation may seem too time-consuming or even like a waste of time for many family business owners. But in the overall scheme of things, the benefits will make you more effective throughout each day. So listen to your body's signals, and take some action to reduce stress through relaxation techniques.

Relaxation can occur in various ways and places. The following techniques can be used at times during the day when you take breaks, as well as when you find yourself in a stressful situation. Keep in mind that a successful relaxation technique should be enjoyable and easy, but that it may take time to perfect.

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### Meditation as a form of relaxation (relaxation response)

Meditation is more than concentrating on a concept; it is the process by which you gain mastery over your reaction to external information (stimuli). Successful meditation involves a



temporary shut down of the information processing mechanisms of the brain. The result is known as the relaxation response. Once you learn it, you can induce the relaxation response whenever you are confronted with a stressful situation.

There are four components standard to most relaxation response strategies. First of all, find a place that is quiet and distraction-free. Second, concentrate on a selected word or phrase in order to clear the mind. The third requirement is a passive attitude, both mentally and physically. Fourth, assume a comfortable position, but one that is not likely to induce sleep.

The relaxation response was developed through the pioneering work of Herbert Benson. To use the relaxation response, take the following steps:

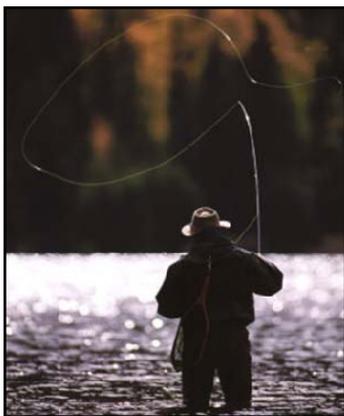
1. Sit quietly and in a comfortable position.
2. Shut your eyes.
3. Relax all muscles, beginning at your feet and moving up to your face. Keep them relaxed.
4. Breathe through the nose, becoming more and more aware of your breathing. When breathing, say the word “one” silently to yourself. Breathe “one,” in...“one,” out, and so on. Your breathing should be easy and natural.
5. Continue the process for 10 to 20 minutes. You may check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit several minutes more, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes open. Do not stand up right away.

Everyone can elicit the relaxation response, whether through Benson’s method or by some other approach. The American Heart Association also recommends meditation, since stress is a risk factor in heart disease, cancer, and other illnesses.

## **Progressive muscular relaxation**

Developed by Edmund Jacobsen, this technique involves a series of sequential physical exercises. Beginning with the lower extremities of the body, the first muscle group is tensed for 7 seconds and then completely relaxed for 20 to 60 seconds. The tension-release pattern is repeated in the original group and then in different muscle groups, moving upward toward the head. Research confirms that if you relax your muscles through focused physical exercises, mental relaxation will follow.

## **Escape for a while.**



A good way to escape is to literally get away. This can mean taking a break from work or, when time permits, physically leaving the day-to-day stresses. One of the most common stresses family business owners face is balancing work and personal life, so it just makes sense to spend vacation time away from work to gain the maximum level of rest.

Intrinsically rewarding experiences can also be great escapes. An intrinsically rewarding activity is one that you enjoy for its own sake and that takes you away from your troubles for a while. A hobby is a good example, but other activities can be less structured. Taking a drive, reading a book, or going for a walk are other simple ideas. Try doing things that you do because you want to, not because you have to, on a regular basis.

## Find what works for you

There are many relaxation techniques. Each person should develop an activity that suits them and gives them the best rest and recovery, whether its prayer, listening to music or relaxation tapes, yoga, massage, or one of the techniques listed.

People vary in their reactions to relaxation techniques. Some people may feel very relaxed soon after trying the exercises. Others may notice relatively little change in their stress level, especially the first few times. If you expected immediate results from these relaxation techniques and did not receive them, you may feel discouraged or want to give up. But don't quit. Keep trying a variety of techniques until you find one that works for you!

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Yates, Jere E. *Managing Stress*. New York: AMACOM, 1979.



**Don't let stress control your life.**

**Practice these steps for a  
successful relaxation technique.**

### Steps to Relaxation Response

1. Sit quietly, in a comfortable position
2. Shut your eyes
3. Relax all muscles, from feet to face, keep them relaxed
4. Breathe deeply through the nose; easy and natural
5. Continue for 10-20 minutes
6. Once you are done, sit several minutes more with eyes closed, then a few minutes with eyes open



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