

A DOCTOR'S GUIDE:

SIMPLE STEPS

TO EASE STRESS

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STARLA FITCH MD
the connection doctor

LOVE **medicine** AGAIN[®]

SIMPLE STEPS

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Let's face it.

We all live our lives with the best of intentions. Well, at least MOST of us do. We believe we are here to live a fulfilled life, be of service, and be happy.

But, in the end, what we haven't learned is how to connect with coworkers. Our families. Or ourselves.

Do you feel like you are just pushing yourself from one day to the next?

Do you sometimes feel people are simply rude?

Does your heart sink when you go that extra mile and instead of saying "Thank You," people say, "OK," as if you did nothing important?

Do you wonder what happened to your high ideals and the passion that you once held for living your best life?

Do you feel snippy, aggravated and just downright TIRED most of the time, nothing like the cup half full person you used to be?

Well, it's time you learned that all of that is OK. It's not your fault. How could you be anything but frustrated in a world gone wacky with the "fix-me-now" mentality?

If you're like me, you not only have your colleagues at work to deal with, but you also have a family and a household to keep in some sort of order.

Not so long ago, I was right there in the thick of the resentment with you. And, don't get me wrong -- many days, I'm back in it again on one or more of the challenges that many of us contend with every day.

But, I discovered something that changed everything for me: It doesn't have to be so hard. Seriously. You know you are smart. You know you can move forward.

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**Stay with me a bit longer,
have a little faith... and read on.**

A few years ago, I was just like you. I was running on system overload. I was the only female in a group of male surgeons. They were convinced that any complaint I had must be related to my hormones.

They constantly reflected my negative feelings back to me instead of taking me seriously.

It was a lose-lost cycle.

Way back when I decided to go to medical school, my dad told me that it was the dumbest idea I'd ever had -- How's that for encouragement?

I've had to work to prove myself from the very beginning. So, yes, I understand where your frustration comes from and where you are when it comes to balancing your ideals with the real world.

Today, I'd like to offer you a little lifeline. I hope you'll reach out for it. I wrote this book, *A Doctor's Guide: Simple Steps to EASE STRESS*, for people just like you.

My examples are from the doctor world, but my steps to ease stress have helped my clients across the board, whether they are accountants, homemakers, healthcare professionals or executives. We all face these same challenges, my friend.

I want you to know you are not alone and there is hope and relief.

It just takes one step at a time. You can do it. I promise.

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STEP 1

SEE YOUR DAY

Now, don't get all wiggly on me, thinking I am creating more work for you. Before you shrug it off as silly, give it a try.

At the beginning of your day, in those first five minutes of quiet when the coffee is not quite ready and you are stretching your arms over your head, wondering how you will do it all AGAIN today, try this:

Sit down someplace quiet and comfortable. Yes, sit.
Close your eyes, just for a moment and take a breath.
Mentally rehearse the big picture of your day.
Inhale slowly, then exhale. Repeat.

This short exercise is called Setting Your Intention. It will guide your day as it progresses. You envision your day in a calm, relaxing way so you can really SEE your latest project or surgery going smoothly, your daughter passing her math test, the painter finally showing up to paint the garage.

Just like in sports, studies have shown that mental visualizations of your day can improve its quality and outcome. When you let yourself imagine the day going smoothly, it has a much better chance of turning out that way.

If you feel confident that your meeting, surgery or presentation will go well, the team will pick up that vibration from you and relax into their efforts to assist you.

It starts with you.

NO DOUBT YOU'VE HEARD THE EXPRESSION "PEOPLE ARE AS HAPPY AS THEY MAKE UP THEIR MINDS TO BE." WELL, THINK ABOUT THAT AS YOU GO THROUGH YOUR DAY.

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STEP 2

SEND YOUR EGO PACKIN'

Yes, you have worked long and hard to get to where you are. We know. And sometimes, you feel a little like Rodney I-don't-get-no-respect-Dangerfield. But guess what? We are all human. We all put our pants on one leg at a time. We are all gifted, special children on this planet.

If your ego is over the top, it's going to interfere with how people respond to you. And it may intimidate others so much that they forget to tell you important facts about that proposal, their medical problems, or the school play your son is in.

ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS FOR "WRONG-SITE SURGERY," I.E., WHEN THE WRONG KIDNEY IS REMOVED OR THE WRONG EYE OPERATED ON, IS BELIEVED TO BE DUE TO A LACK OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SURGEON AND THE STAFF.

IF THE STAFF FEELS ANXIOUS BECAUSE THE "BIG IMPORTANT DOCTOR" IS IN THE ROOM, THEY MAY NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE CORRECTING THE DOCTOR THAT IT'S THE LEFT KIDNEY WHEN THE DOCTOR BOLDLY STATES IT IS THE RIGHT KIDNEY.

Remember, it's not about you and your ego; it's about meeting each other on an even playing field.

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STEP 3

SAY YOUR THANK YOU'S

Yes, your momma was right. Each interaction – from the grocery store clerk to the bank teller to the front desk staff – deserves a thoughtful response.

Doesn't it make you crazy when your children forget to say "Please" and "Thank you"?

Well, how do you think it makes your coworkers feel? Or your friends?

You set the tone everywhere you go. Make it a good one. You will never regret it.

I'LL NEVER FORGET ONE DAY IN THE O.R. WHEN EACH STEP OF THE CASE FELT AS IF I WERE INDIANA JONES FIGHTING OFF TREASURE LOOTERS.

WE WERE "MAKING PROGRESS" BUT IN A SLOW TORTUOUS WAY. AT ONE POINT, I SARCASTICALLY ASKED THE HEAD NURSE, "WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO GET A HEAD LIGHT IN HERE?!"

SHE JUST STOOD AND LOOKED AT ME FOR A MOMENT. I CAUGHT HER DRIFT. COMPLETELY.

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND SAID, "LET ME REPHRASE THAT. COULD I PLEASE HAVE A HEAD LIGHT WHEN YOU GET A MOMENT?"

THREE SECONDS LATER, THE HEADLIGHT WAS IN THE ROOM, HOOKED UP, AND ON MY HEAD. AND THE CASE WENT SMOOTHLY FROM THERE WITH NO MORE FANFARE.

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STEP 4

SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

You know deep in your heart that you could not live your life fully without others being in your corner.

Whether it's your faithful assistant in the operating room, your child's babysitter, or your coworker who goes to bat for you.

It's important to let others know you realize it takes a village.

When success happens (and it will!), share your high-fives with those who helped.

Why think twice about complimenting the folks who've got your back, 24/7?

AS SOMEONE WHO IS VERY TYPE-A AND A REGISTERED "OVER-PLANNER," I WAS PULLED UP SHORT AND REMINDED OF HOW IMPORTANT MY TEAM WAS RECENTLY. I WAS PERFORMING A DELICATE SURGERY ON A PATIENT WHO WAS ALLERGIC TO LATEX. THIS MEANT GREAT CARE IN USING CERTAIN GLOVES AND INSTRUMENTS.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PROCEDURE, I ASKED MY ASSISTANT TO HAND ME THE SPECIAL STERILIZED RUBBER BAND SUTURE I NEEDED FOR THIS PROCEDURE.

THERE WAS A SLIGHT PAUSE. THEN, IN A QUIET VOICE, MY ASSISTANT SAID, "WE CAN'T USE THAT. SHE'S ALLERGIC TO LATEX."

NOW IT WAS MY TURN TO PAUSE. HMMMMM. AS I WAS NEGOTIATING IN MY MIND ANOTHER APPROACH, SHE VOLUNTEERED, "THERE ARE SOME SPECIAL VASCULAR TIES THAT MIGHT WORK THAT ARE NOT LATEX. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THEM?"

SAVED BY MY ASSISTANT! THANKS TO HER FORETHOUGHT AND HER TEAM EFFORT, THE SURGERY WENT WELL AND ENDED SUCCESSFULLY.

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STEP 5

STATE YOUR GRATITUDE

We are all busy and we each have many jobs to do. But we have to keep in mind that we've been given a sacred gift: the gift of being here to connect with each other.

Like it or not, we are each role models for someone, whether it's our colleagues, our patients, or our families. And we have to step up to this challenge every day.

Don't wait until you have your "best day ever" to let others know you as a human being.

Encourage folks to look for ways to infuse positive thought and action into each day. They will follow your lead. Make sure you are pointing them in the right direction.

I'M PROUD TO SAY THAT WHEN I COME INTO THE O.R., I ASK EACH STAFF PERSON TO NAME THREE THINGS HE OR SHE IS GRATEFUL FOR THAT DAY.

IT MAY BE AS SIMPLE AS, "IT'S FRIDAY. IT'S PAYDAY. IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO RAIN THIS WEEKEND."

BUT USUALLY IT'S MORE HEARTFELT:

"I'M GRATEFUL MY MOM'S SURGERY WENT OKAY AND SHE'S DOING WELL. I'M GRATEFUL FOR MY HUSBAND WHO KEEPS HIS SENSE OF HUMOR. I'M GRATEFUL TO BE IN AMERICA, WHERE WE HAVE ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER, STERILE INSTRUMENTS AND GREAT MEDICAL CARE."

SOMETIMES EVEN STAFF WHO AREN'T IN MY ROOM WILL POP IN TO SHARE THREE THINGS THEY ARE GRATEFUL FOR THAT DAY. I TRY TO LET MY PATIENTS KNOW ABOUT THIS PRACTICE AHEAD OF TIME BECAUSE I THINK IT MAKES THEM FEEL CARED FOR AND MORE CALM.

AND ONE PATIENT, AN ELDERLY GENTLEMAN WHO WAS JUST GETTING READY TO GO TO SLEEP FOR HIS SURGERY, SAID, "I JUST WANT TO SAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR ALL OF YOU IN THIS ROOM."

YOU CAN BELIEVE WE ALL SMILED A BIT TEARY-EYED, AND DID OUR VERY BEST TO MAKE SURE HE REMAINED GRATEFUL THROUGHOUT HIS HOSPITAL STAY.

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A SPECIAL NOTE TO YOU

I hope the Simple Steps will help ease your stress. I invite you to become a part of the conversation by joining me at StarlaFitchMD.com. You'll receive weekly inspiration and tips and be part of a supportive global community. What started as a way to help healthcare providers **LoveMedicineAgain** and fight burnout has expanded into a community of folks from all walks of life improving their connection and their lives.

We're glad you're here. And remember: we're all in this together.

Starla Fitch MD

See my latest TEDx talk on Connection [HERE](#).

You can also follow me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).



Dr. Starla Fitch is an oculoplastic surgeon who has made it her life's mission to help people see more clearly, literally and figuratively. Known as "The Connection Doctor," Dr. Fitch is the #1 international bestselling author of [Remedy for Burnout](#). She is also a professional speaker specializing in corporate wellness and burnout, a leadership consultant and a certified life coach. She speaks around the world on "4 Steps from Burnout to Balance," and "The Power of Connection."

Dr. Fitch and her husband, Dr. Chris Vandewater, an oral surgeon, live in Atlanta and like to experience new challenges. The latest challenge is electric guitar lessons. Earplugs optional.