

SLOW the FLO:

Excerpts from an interview with Dr. Darek Dawda,
psychologist and founder of DAVDA Psychology

By Mathilda Waters



I have been quite stressed out lately, so arranged to meet for an interview with Dr. Darek Dawda, a psychotherapist and life coach – an expert on how to deal with stress. I met with Dr. Dawda in his very comfortable office on the corner of Stafford and Dorchester, where we had a good chat over a cup of warm rooibos tea. Dr. Dawda wasted no time getting to the point.

Dr. DD: We live in a chronically anxious culture, during chronically anxious times, and many of us pay a price for this. Combine the external pressures and expectations people are exposed to in this 21st century of ours with poor skills to cope with such pressures and you have a problem.

MW: What can people do about stress?

Dr. DD: There are the objective stressors that impact us from outside, and there is the way we cope with stressors – dealing with both is very important. Part of the solution is to step back and make some decisions about the sort of life you want. Really think about it. You can't get everything, be everything, or be everywhere. So decide on those things that really matter to you, and see if you can restructure things around you so that your environment better serves your needs. Usually, there are things everyone can do to improve their situations, like simplifying their lives, or maximizing the activities that are meaningful and intrinsically satisfying.

MW: And if one can't or is not willing to change their situation?

Dr. DD: Then one has to optimize one's coping with stress. Otherwise, you will find yourself in a state of constant overdrive. When stressed for a long time, your body might lose its capacity to come back down to idle, and without proper rest and rejuvenation, the organism becomes much more vulnerable to depression and physical illness.

MW: I notice that you are holding your forehead as you talk about 'CONSTANT STATE OF OVER-DRIVE.'

Dr. DD: Yes. The majority of people who are chronically stressed have too much activity in their frontal lobes. I call this syndrome Frontal Lobes Over-activation or FLO for short. Essentially, many of us worry too much, think too much, obsess and ruminate too much, and we don't know how to turn it off. We get caught in our heads. It's this activity here, in our frontal lobes behind our eyes that greatly contributes to the trouble. It's mental overdrive. Thinking, of course, is good for you. But constant thinking interferes with your body's basic regulatory functions, which contributes to anxiety, sleep problems, and eventually depression and health problems. For example, contrary to what might be the popular belief, depressed people live in a state of constant overdrive. And there is a lot of good research linking chronic stress with deterioration in physical health as well.

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MW: And psychologists can help people lower their stress levels?

Dr. DD: Absolutely. There are many ways in which a psychologist can help you cope with stress better. In my practice, I draw on different techniques – such as mindfulness, relaxation, focusing, hypnosis, and so on - to help people SLOW the FLO. It usually takes a little bit of help and practice, and then people can start applying those techniques on their own. It's very satisfying to see people find solutions where they least expect it, in a state of intrinsic well-being that already exists within them. In my coaching and psychotherapy experience, much improvement happens when people tap into their nature-given ability to SLOW the FLO.

MW: You do 'psychotherapy' and 'coaching' - what is the difference?

Dr. DD: I combine both. Coaching is typically used with people who do not necessarily suffer from any significant psychological problems, but still would like some assistance optimizing their happiness, health, and success. Many psychologists today are turning towards more positive approaches to psychotherapy, helping people draw the best out of themselves and their lives. In such approaches, overcoming suffering becomes a part of a greater agenda of optimizing well-being. I like thinking of psychological problems as opportunities to grow stronger and wiser. There is also a great health value in positive things like love, fun, laughter, creativity, and so on. Essentially, I see my role as a psychotherapist as someone who can help you clarify where you are in your life, where you would like to be, and help you figure out the best ways to get from here to there.

MW: Sounds good to me. Where does one find a psychologist?

Dr. DD: If you do not know anyone who can recommend one, private practice psychologists are listed in the Yellow Pages and on the website of the Manitoba Psychological Society at www.mps.mb.ca

Most extended health care plans cover private psychological services. Also, nearly every hospital and several public agencies have psychologists – it is worth phoning around.

MW: Thank you Doctor Dawda, I am already feeling better...