

According to Bob Feldman,
 “The only way to live a stress-free life is to kill yourself and die.”

“We can’t eliminate stress,” he says, “but how we react to it makes the difference. Positive stress can challenge, push, it’s motivation. It’s what takes you out of the comfort zone.”

And for expats, Singapore can be a little out of the comfort zone. A myriad of factors contribute to this: moving far away from family, starting a new job, adapting to the climate, coping with a foreign culture, helping kids adjust and finding what you need – products, services, recreation outlets, advice, new friends.

Bob, a Personal Efficiency Programme consultant for D’Oz International, calls the first few months in Singapore the ‘honeymoon stage’. Newcomers are fascinated by new foods, faces and surroundings. But somewhere between months three and nine people tend to develop irritation, rebellion and negative attitudes. If you can get past that stage, he adds, you’ll be fine.

“Sometimes you just need to stew in your own juices for a while,” he says, “but then you must move out of the victim stage and into acceptance. If you stew for too long in your stress, it implodes. Get the words out of your mouth. Only after you develop awareness can you properly address the causes of your stress.”

His advice for expatriates is not unlike the advice he gives to corporate groups, for example Proctor & Gamble, HSBC Insurance and Deutsche Bank. “Asians work more hours than Westerners,” he says, “and most expats who come here are in positions of high responsibility. So they will bring work home, either as paperwork or in their heads.”

Symptoms of stress include headaches, irritability and fatigue – if these symptoms become your life, he suggests sitting down and really exploring your options. Do

No generic expat exists in Singapore, but some generic opportunities do. Bob says:

- Get a maid. It gives you more time and space for yourself.
- Contact people from your home countries through clubs, schools, embassy events and religious institutions.
- Carry a piece of home with you wherever you go and communicate often with loved ones.
- Take advantage of travel in Asia. In [Singapore’s] movement to modernize, old buildings and natural forests have been chopped down ... you have to get away sometimes.

you need a day off? A vacation? Or an entirely new career?

The things Bob Feldman has to tell you about stress may not differ greatly from what others have said or what you already know. Be organized, healthy and aware of your goals and your place in the universe. Take time for yourself; take breaks when you need them – they actually make you more efficient. “If you just walk away, more often than not you’ll suddenly get unstuck.”

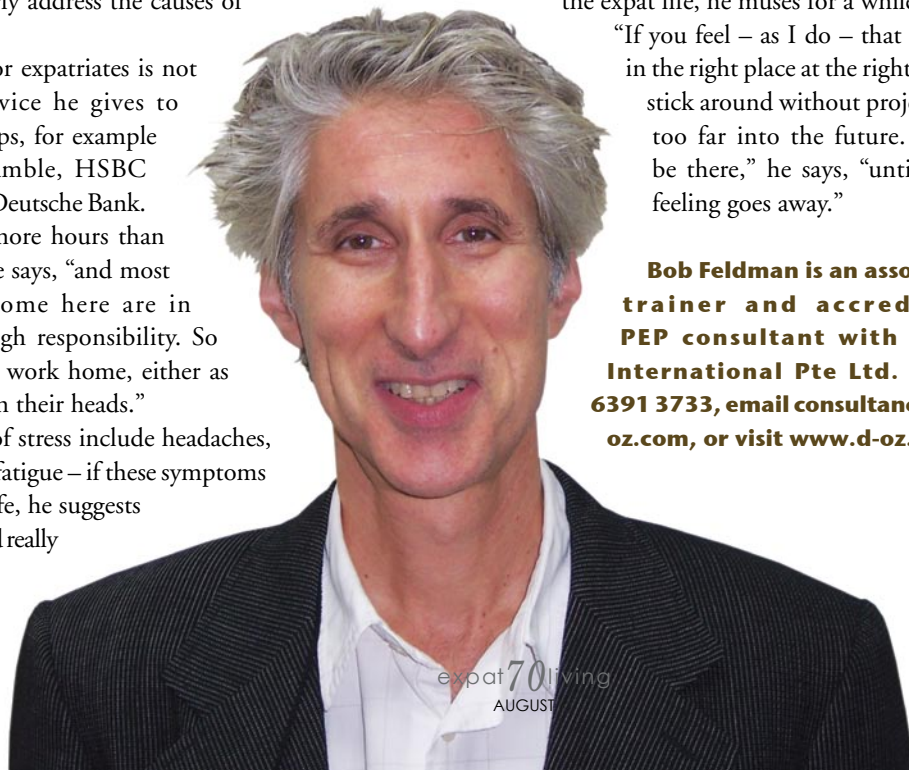
He also recommends scheduling time for what he calls ‘backlogs’, those nagging projects and errands that have been put off for more pressing responsibilities, and also time to reflect on the accomplishments

of the day and make plans for tomorrow. Though his efficiency plan may seem to add a lot to an already long day, “Overtime,” he reminds us, “is not necessarily overstressed.”

Bob says it’s always enriching to experience different cultures. But as for how long one should live the expat life, he muses for a while.

“If you feel – as I do – that you’re in the right place at the right time, stick around without projecting too far into the future. Fully be there,” he says, “until that feeling goes away.”

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The STRESS Doctor

by Erika Kelsey