STRESS

When pressure compresses perspective, mistake risk increases

Stress showed up in our study as a condition that reshapes how entrepreneurs see their work.

Participants didn't describe stress only as anxiety or overload. More often, they described **operating under constant urgency** — too many demands, too little time, and pressure to keep things moving. Under those conditions, work still gets done, but perspective narrows.

When stress is high, everything feels important. True priorities blur with noise. Entrepreneurs are more likely to rush some decisions while postponing others, react instead of sequence, and focus on what's loud or immediate rather than what's consequential.

What makes stress especially risky is that it *feels productive*. You're busy. You're responding. You're moving fast. But pressure quietly compresses judgment, making it harder to step back, compare options, or notice second-order effects.

The goal isn't to eliminate pressure — entrepreneurship always involves it. The goal is to recognize when stress is distorting perspective, and to use simple practices that restore clarity before rushed choices or misaligned effort create avoidable problems.

Below are three practical tools entrepreneurs use to reduce mistake risk when pressure is high.

1. Separate urgency from importance — deliberately

Under stress, the loudest demand often wins — even when it isn't the most important or the most consequential.

That's why it helps to pause briefly at predictable pressure points — at the start of the day, before committing to new work, or when multiple requests collide — to separate what's urgent, what's important, and what can wait.

A simple corrective habit is to pause and briefly re-sort work into three buckets:

- **Must do now** (real consequences if delayed)
- **Important but can wait**

- **Noise for now**

This brief reframing helps prevent pressure from driving attention toward what's merely urgent — and away from what actually matters.

You're not ignoring work. You're sequencing it so pressure doesn't make the decisions for you.

2. Slow the moment that locks in consequences

Stress pushes speed — especially at the exact moments when slowing down would help most. Identify the moments where decisions become commitments: customer promises, pricing, approvals, messaging, or scope changes. Before finalizing, insert a short pause and ask:

- What decision am I really making here?
- What problem am I trying to solve?
- Will this choice actually help achieve that outcome?

Even a few seconds can restore perspective and reduce stress-driven missteps.

3. Use brief questions to reopen perspective

When pressure is high, expansive thinking shuts down.

One way entrepreneurs counter this is by keeping a small set of grounding questions handy, such as:

- What happens if I delay this by a day?
- What's the downside of saying no — or not now?
- If this goes wrong, what's the most likely reason?

These aren't meant to overanalyze. They're meant to reopen perspective just enough so stress doesn't collapse options into a single rushed path.

A final note

Stress isn't a sign you're doing something wrong. It's a sign you're operating under pressure.

The purpose of these tools isn't to reduce ambition or slow momentum. It's to prevent urgency from quietly overriding judgment — so pressure doesn't turn capable leadership into avoidable mistakes.

Questions or reflections? If you have questions, comments, or want to share how the Quiz or these tools helped you, feel free to email me at: **author@williamholsten.com**