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MD, MBA**

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MEMBER



Doctor's Orders!

Interview: Dr. Gaby Corá, MD, MBA

As president of the Executive Health & Wealth Institute and holder of both a medical degree and an MBA, Dr. Gaby Corá knows a thing or two about the increasing stress and challenges faced by today's credit union executives. Listen in as this jack of all trades discusses what you can do to meet these pressures head on.

By LaRita M. Heet

Executive Health & Wealth Institute president Gabriela Corá, MD, MBA – aka Dr. Gaby Corá – calls herself a “jack of all trades,” and she's not kidding. Corá is a wellness coach, a corporate consultant, a board-certified psychiatrist and a licensed physician in Florida, where she and her neurologist husband co-founded the Florida NeuroScience Center. In addition to her everyday work, Corá, an active board member of the American Psychiatric Foundation and a member of the Women Presidents' Organization, has authored two books, including the most recent release, “Leading Under Pressure: Maximize Your Health While Building Your Wealth.” This impressive CV adds up to one thing: Corá is one of today's leading experts in the health issues that most affect today's executives.

Corá's varied interests led this one-woman dynamo to her one-of-a-kind career, she says. “From a medical perspective, I was always extremely



Dr. Gaby Corá - Wellness Coach and Corporate Consultant

Technology has had a huge impact ... on stress.

interested in all of the prevention parts, but I had more of a formal education in the traditional sense, [first] in medicine and then as a fellow at the National Institutes of Health – so very traditional, very scientific. And my area of expertise, my main interest, was always mood and anxiety issues, meaning depression and anxiety, with panic disorder and some other issues [revolving] around those areas.”

Through her private practice and brief work at pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, Corá noticed many corporate bigwigs who, in spite of (or perhaps because of) loving their jobs, had started to burn out. “Careers that they had loved at a certain point in time became somewhat meaningless,” she says.

The realization that this phenomenon was happening to “very, very high-functioning folks,” she says, caught her attention and gave a renewed focus to her work. “This is where ‘leading under pressure’ as an idea, summarizing everything that I was doing, came in.”

Today, Corá focuses on helping businesspeople deal with stress management and teaches them what she calls “burn-out

prevention.” “It was basically because I was seeing many people [who] were burned out. Some had a lot of money but they were not necessarily happy, and the health paradigm was not really addressing their needs. So I [realized] the best way to address these needs is to both prioritize and help people organize themselves and plan ahead, from more of a business perspective. At the same time, [it was to] make sure that they’re in the best health they can be, from an intellectual, emotional and physical level, so that they can work at their very maximum productivity and performance while being healthy and well.”

Corá’s clientele – primarily entrepreneurs and executives – are particularly drawn to her combination of executive expertise and broad knowledge base. “The reason why they like to come in is – everyone tells me this, because I ask them – it’s the MD/MBA degree combined. They kind of feel that I can really help not only from a strict medical perspective, but also [by] organizing their time, planning, prioritizing. Sometimes a lot of what I may do is, say they have some trouble with some other employees, I may coach them behind the scenes so that they can improve their relationships with other people, too.”

The Diagnosis

It should come as no surprise that today’s executives are under more pressure than they were in the past. The number one and two stressors? Technology and expectations/competition.

Technology: Color us shocked that technology – the one thing that is supposed to make our lives easier – is also the primary factor in the stress level of today’s business leaders. “If you were in business 20 years ago, you may have sent a letter, and you may have expected a response within a week or two; whereas now, with instant technology, we are inundated by tons of information and tons of communications,” says Corá. “Just by virtue of having that geometric explosion, the demands are much higher. So, there’s a lot of that external pressure and demand, even from clients, or employees, or other bosses saying, ‘So, you didn’t read my email?’”

Part of the technology problem is the expectation that you will be in constant communication, day or night, Corá says. “I remember the first time I was working for corporate America, and for the first time, we were given a Blackberry. Some people loved it, and they stayed until 2:00 a.m. responding to the



messages. I immediately [realized] it may be a double-edged sword, because [for instance] you're on a plane and people are desperately trying to respond as soon as you were about to depart.... So the expectations have gone much higher," she says.

Another problem, says Corá, is not in the gadgets themselves, but in the power people give to those gadgets, even keeping them on their nightstand table while they sleep. "Instead of saying, 'Well, I'm going to bed by 10:00 [or] 11:00 ... I need to sleep,' the priorities have shifted, and a gadget becomes a living element, so to speak," she says. "I think technology has had a huge impact. I really love the positives it has brought, but I think it has also forced people to look at how they conduct business.

Expectations and Competition: Busy executives also face high expectations – not just from others, but from themselves – to constantly be available, to be top notch, to stay very busy and [to] work nonstop. "That may, in itself, push the person to the extreme, where they may be working 20-hour days," says Corá.

"Careers that they had loved ... became somewhat meaningless."

Self-imposed expectations are often necessary to compete and be effective in today's workforce. If your credit union's other leaders put in 70-hour weeks, and you're out of there every day at 5:00, with no weekends, the worry – real or imagined – that people will talk is likely to weigh on your mind. "That [type of schedule] may not even exist at these high positions," she says.

Competition comes not only with the increased expectations, but also with executives worrying that they'll be jobless if they do not perform at their very best, says Corá.

The unforgiving work schedules, compounded with lack of balance between work and "real life," can lead executives to re-examine their priorities, notes Corá. "It [this type of sched-

ule] really forces people to think about the lifestyle they want, and sometimes, it really forces them to double-check on what their dreams were and what their reality is. Many people want to advance in their careers, but in general, that advancement has always been so as to improve your lifestyle, and improve the potential future for your family. But when that [improvement] becomes the center of your life ... and no matter what promotion you get or how much more money you get, it's never enough, then that does become a problem," she says.

"One of the key aspects I've always worked on with executives and entrepreneurs, particularly if they are not feeling the joy of their great accomplishments, is to help them take a little [celebratory] time every time they have a great victory. What usually happens is, people have their victory, they don't have any time to [acknowledge it], so they move on to the next quest," she says. Without stopping to realize one's successes, it's not long before the executives begin to run out of stamina – and out of breath.

Credit union executives (and other non-profit leaders) can face particular pressures, says Corá. "In general, what you have in a very nice way, particularly for those people [who are] working for non-profits, is people who are really devoted to or inspired by the mission, and that is usually a reason why they decide to work for that greater good. It can get extremely competitive for them, too, and if you really try to bring in the next business step for a promotion and/or for an opportunity for growth, then you may very well have some increased stress.

"The other stress that may also come in – and particularly in the financial area – [is that] even if, for some reason, you don't believe that you're going to be touched by what's going on in other financial institutions, by virtue of just being there, it could be a very chaotic time, too," says Corá. "So, whether or not you feel that it (upheaval) directly applies to you, there's always that uncertainty about what would happen to my job – will I still have a place to come? Will I still have a job tomorrow?"

Consumer expectations that an executive will have total accountability have increased and are "widely expected," says Corá. As an executive MBA teacher at the University of Miami, Corá teaches about issues in healthcare – issues that can also relate to executives in other fields, including banking, she says. "That level of accountability and those expectations are there particularly because we're brokers of information. So, at a

“...Take a little [celebratory] time every time they have a great victory.”

financial institution, if you're looking up to someone who's in charge of your account, you're really looking up to that person as a broker of information. And if they that person misguide you – or if they omit information that will help you make other decisions or help you decide not to make certain decisions – if for some reason the client or the customer thought that they were misguided, then that [type of situation] would increase the chances of being sued. Consumers have more and more power,” Corá says.

The RX for Execs

There is a solution to executive-level stress – a multi-faceted solution, says Corá. By this declaration, she is referring to the key dimensions of a person's well-being. Within each executive level, taking short- and long-term measures can reduce your stress and improve your overall state of being.

Physical: Corá refers to sleep, exercise, nutrition and relaxation as the “four pillars of biological health.” She says, “Anyone who is experiencing distress has to work with that biology so that they can better control their physiology.”

- **Exercise:** Repetitive exercises – by nature, boring – can not only help a person stay physically fit but can also help him relax better and contro his degree of stress. Corá recommends 30 minutes of exercise per day, which can be squeezed in before work, during your lunch break or after work, without significantly altering your workday.
- **Sleeping:** As workdays grow, the typical exec's sleeping intervals shrivel, says Corá. Many of her first-time, uber-stressed-out clients suffer from broken or disorganized sleep. Those who travel

frequently – often taking red-eyes back to back – may sleep poorly two or more nights in a row. No matter how busy you are, at least six hours of uninterrupted sleep a night is crucial.

- **Relaxation:** From music and exercise to guided imagery, relaxation is available from many sources and it should be based on your individual needs. Yoga may help you relax, but it might energize your coworker.
- **Nutrition:** It's a well-established fact that many Americans have poor diets. Lack of proper nutrition, in addition to causing an endless list of health problems and risks, means you don't have the energy to work at full capacity. “Very busy executives sometimes don't even have time to eat, or on the other hand, sometimes they will just go from function to function so they overeat,” says Corá.

Emotional: The executive's emotional health encompasses his relationships with others: his coworkers, his spouse, his children and more. “So the problem many people in this situation have is that sometimes they don't know [what's going on]; they're very busy, and they're not so involved in their kids' lives. [As a result,] it then comes as a surprise that their kids are having trouble in high school. Taking the time to nurture your relationships is vital to nurturing your own emotional health.

Intellectual: On an intellectual level, someone who feels crippled by stress is less able to function at his very best. “What happens with stress is you think about fewer options, because you tend to have more of that monovision: You're so concerned about the problem that you stop looking at the whole picture, [thereby precluding yourself from] coming up with improvements and other ... ideas,” she says.

Before you get stressed-out over the many stress relievers, take the time to look at the overall way in which you can tackle each one of these issues. Then, maximize your well-being within each one of these areas.

Getting to Work

Corá's coaching participants are expected to have to work toward results, she says – and so should you. "If they just want the medication alone, there are many other people they can go to, spending less time and less effort. I will make them work to show up here, to exercise regularly, to look at their nutrition, to start relaxing, to work on their relationships with people they love. So, it is hard work.

"I notice that by creating this eclectic, hybrid way of putting it all together, people end up improving a lot more, living more fulfilling lives, having better relationships with other people," she says. "People who have always experienced tremendous anxiety all of a sudden were at peace, and that [turnaround] was extremely rewarding to me. A little bit by default, [but] in a way I really thank my clients and patients for having helped



me evolve in this way. Even [when] writing the books, I really wrote them to help people, in terms of their interests. It was a way of condensing a lot of the information we did in-house, so that they could have a plan when they were not at my office. I've always loved to put together the tools I use – my critical-thinking process – so that they can help themselves," she says.

Corá's clients never fail to be amazed when a simple fix like cutting their 16-hour days to 12-hour days makes a tremendous difference in their overall health and success. "It's fewer hours so they're not burned out; they're not stressed out to the

Four pillars of biological health: sleep, exercise, nutrition and relaxation

point where they can't even think about new options. [Instead,] they're being very strategic with activities that only they can do," she says. "They end up being more efficient with more energy and making more money."

Walking the Walk at Your CU

How can you share these healthy habits with your credit union employees? Organizations and CEOs that want top-performing employees must demonstrate their commitment to the total health and wellness of their staff, says Corá. "Unless the boss – the CEO-level all the way down – is deeply involved ... and really [adding] value, making sure he has a healthy organization, it doesn't happen," she says.

"This has to come from way up into the rest of your organization. Many times, what you have is an organization that wants to check [by doing] a wellness program for its employees, but its culture doesn't provide for great ways in which employees can maximize their performance and productivity, while at the same time, staying healthy."

Doctor's orders!

For more information about Dr. Gaby Corá or the Executive Health & Wealth Institute, or to purchase Dr. Gaby Corá's books, visit www.drgabycora.com or www.executivehealthwealth.com, or call 305-762-7632.

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