

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Why acting out of character can lower your stress**

Feeling anxious about post-Christmas bills? Worried about relationships or job prospects? Act in a way that doesn't come naturally and you could begin to feel a whole lot better – that's the claim in a book launched today ***FLEX: Do Something Different. How to use the other 9/10ths of your personality***, by psychologists Professor Ben (C) Fletcher and Professor Karen Pine from the University of Hertfordshire.

Most of us tend to respond to situations in habitual ways, say the psychologists. People can reduce their stress if they act out of character. The approach is based on the notion that people do not use enough of the behavioural repertoire they have available to them. Indeed research shows that many people use as little as 1/10th of possible behaviours. The new book shows how making small behavioural changes can improve lives – including reducing stress.

### **Changing lives, one small step at a time**

The approach outlined in the book has been widely used by companies and individuals. A pilot community programme in West Norfolk called Do Something Different has achieved remarkable results. In the core sample of over 150 people who have completed the programme so far:

- **71.1% achieved positive changes in anxiety scores, and of those who were at clinical levels, 70% moved to normal levels.**
- **74.5% achieved positive changes in depression scores, with 67% of those at clinically high scores moving to normal levels**
- **Many people achieved radical changes in their lives**

## How does it work?

After an initial questionnaire that rates current behaviours, habits and feelings, each person receives a series of Do's. These are designed to help them break old habits, see things from a fresh perspective and ease themselves outside of their personal comfort zones.

The Do's, usually sent by text or email, start off simply. 'Walk a different way to the shops'. 'Listen to someone else's music'. As the Do-er's confidence grows, the Do's get more tailored to the individual's personal behaviour profile, helping them to expand new areas of their personality.

A very *systematic* person might be encouraged to be more *spontaneous*, to:

- Phone an old friend out of the blue
- Turn up at the cinema and watch the next film that's starting
- Drop everything and invite a friend or colleague for a coffee

Someone who's *introverted* would be encouraged to try these *extraverted* Do's:

- Say hello to someone you've never spoken to before
- Practise telling a funny story, embellish it for effect
- Organise a night out at a karaoke bar, put your name down first.

The emphasis is on expanding the range of behaviours people use, so they **flex** the behaviours that don't come naturally. People find they can approach old problems in new ways, which can help to reduce stress.

Professor Ben (C) Fletcher explains that it's all about behavioural flexibility. "*The more behaviours you have in your toolbox, the more able you are to react to different situations in your life, the less anxious you will be. Our Do Something Different programme helps people to develop new behaviours and break*

*restrictive habits. It's easy to do, most people find it great fun and it gets fantastic results."*

***FLEX: Do Something Different. How to use the other 9/10ths of your personality***, by psychologists Professor Ben (C) Fletcher and Professor Karen Pine, is published today, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012, by University of Hertfordshire Press.

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**Available for TV or radio interviews:**

Professor Ben (C) Fletcher, and Professor Karen Pine

**Additional Resources:**

Case studies of participants who have completed the pilot Do Something Different programme in West Norfolk. (Contact Ronel Erasmus [ronel@dsd.me](mailto:ronel@dsd.me)).

Copies of the new book ***FLEX: Do Something Different. How to use the other 9/10ths of your personality*** (contact Jane Housham).

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