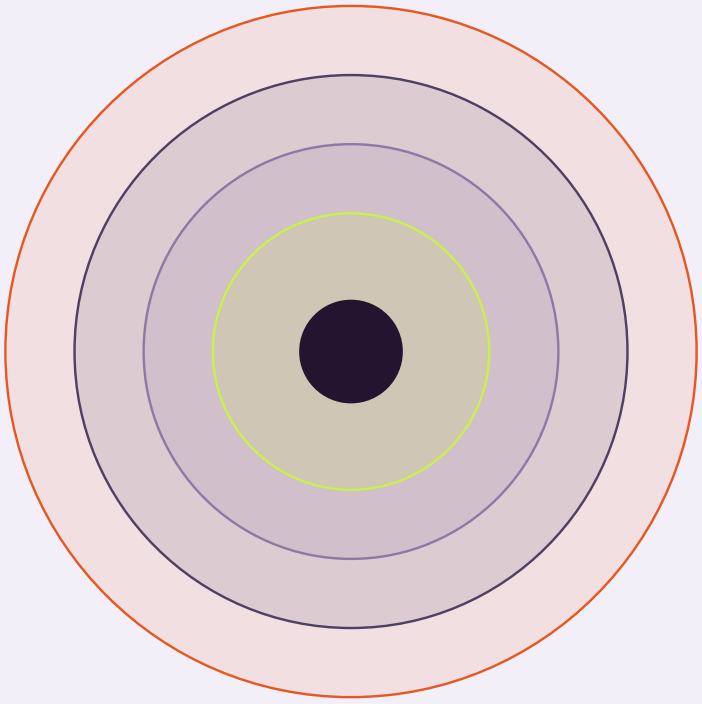


Le stress au travail vs le stress du travail

A reading of the book by Sonia Lupien (2023)

1. ACTION BOOK

CONTENTS

Inside this edition

The book in a minute 3

The takeaways 4

Your action book 6

Before you go 7

PART TWO · THE ACTION BOOK

The setup checklist 9

Protect one deep block a day 10

Park the thought, then go back 11

Answer messages in batches 12

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Le stress au travail vs le stress du travail, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Sonia Lupien is the founder and director of the Centre for Studies on Human Stress and a full professor of psychiatry at Université de Montréal, and she held a Canada Research Chair on human stress. Le stress au travail vs le stress du travail (in English, Stress at Work vs. the Stress of Work) was published in French by Éditions Va Savoir in November 2023, in its collection Vivre avec le stress. The title names two different problems. Stress at work comes from external stressors. The stress of work comes from the way the work itself asks the brain to operate, and in Lupien's account it is that way of working which creates mental overload, a precursor to burnout. She traces how work stress built up through historical shifts, from the Industrial Revolution to women entering the workforce and the arrival of new technologies, and names four triggers of stress: novelty, unpredictability, a low sense of control and a threat to the ego. Her argument is that where you work matters less than fragmented attention. Deep work lowers stress, she says, and a structured hybrid schedule that alternates shallow and deep blocks raises productivity while lowering it.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Stress at work and the stress of work are two different problems.

Stress at work (au travail) comes from external stressors. The stress of work (du travail) comes from the way the work asks the brain to operate. Lupien drew the distinction behind her title in a Radio-Canada interview in December 2023, and the two call for different fixes.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Mental overload comes from how we ask the brain to work.

In Lupien's account it is the way the work is organised for the mind, more than any single stressor, that creates mental overload. She describes that overload as a precursor to burnout.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

It is not where you work that stresses you. It is fragmented attention.

Office, kitchen table or train: Lupien moves the question away from the place. What matters is whether your attention is broken into pieces all day long.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Every interruption has a recovery cost.

On Radio-Canada, Lupien cited an average of 23 minutes and 15 seconds to recover from an interruption. It is a figure she cited in the interview, not a finding the book claims as its own, but it shows why a day of small breaks can leave little time for real thinking.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Deep work lowers stress.

Long stretches of focused work are not only more productive in Lupien's account. They are also calmer for the brain than a day spent switching from one demand to the next.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Alternate shallow and deep blocks on purpose.

Lupien's answer to the hybrid debate is structure: a schedule that alternates blocks of shallow work, such as messages and meetings, with blocks of deep work. She says that structure raises productivity while lowering stress.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Working from home is not the same thing as being productive.

Looking across about ten years of telework studies, Lupien described a honeymoon of about two and a half years, followed by lower productivity and higher stress. She also says she sees no data that supports a full return to the office. The way the work is organised matters more than the address.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Stress has four triggers you can learn to name.

Lupien names novelty, unpredictability, a low sense of control and a threat to the ego. Spotting which one is present in a tense moment turns a vague feeling into something you can look at.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The way we work now was built up over history.

Lupien traces work stress through historical shifts: the Industrial Revolution, women entering the workforce, and new technologies. Seeing how the modern workday was assembled makes it easier to see that it can be arranged differently.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Count one day's interruptions
- [ ] Draw tomorrow as blocks
- [ ] Put deep blocks in your calendar
- [ ] Give shallow work a home
- [ ] Name the triggers of one hard week

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Protect one deep block a day
- ◯ Park the thought, then go back
- ◯ Answer messages in batches

30 days · Nov 13 - Dec 12, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 13 - Dec 12, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Count one day's interruptions

On an ordinary workday, make a tally mark every time something breaks your focus: a ping, a question, a tab you open on impulse.

Put the total into the interruption ledger on this page.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Draw tomorrow as blocks

Use the day planner on this page to lay out tomorrow as alternating deep and shallow blocks.

Copy the strip and keep it where you will see it in the morning.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Put deep blocks in your calendar

Book your deep blocks as appointments with yourself, with notifications off for their length.

A block that is not in the calendar is easy for someone else to fill.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Give shallow work a home

Pick the shallow blocks where email, messages and quick calls belong, and tell the people you work with when you usually reply.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Name the triggers of one hard week

At the end of a stressful week, list three tense moments and mark which of the four triggers each one carried: novelty, unpredictability, low control or a threat to the ego.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Protect one deep block a day

Keep at least one block each day for a single task, with messages closed.

Nov 13 - Dec 12, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Park the thought, then go back

When something pulls at you during a deep block, write it on a paper list for your next shallow block instead of acting on it now.

Nov 13 - Dec 12, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Answer messages in batches

Read and answer messages during your shallow blocks rather than as they arrive, and notice how the deep blocks feel without them.

Nov 13 - Dec 12, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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30 ○						

December 2026

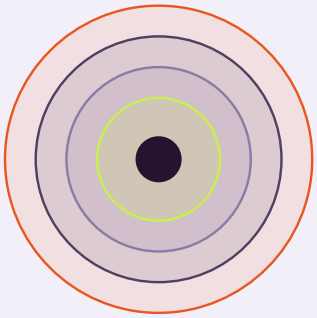
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Change where you sit and the day can feel the same. Change how the day asks you to think, and it can feel lighter.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER SONIA LUPIEN