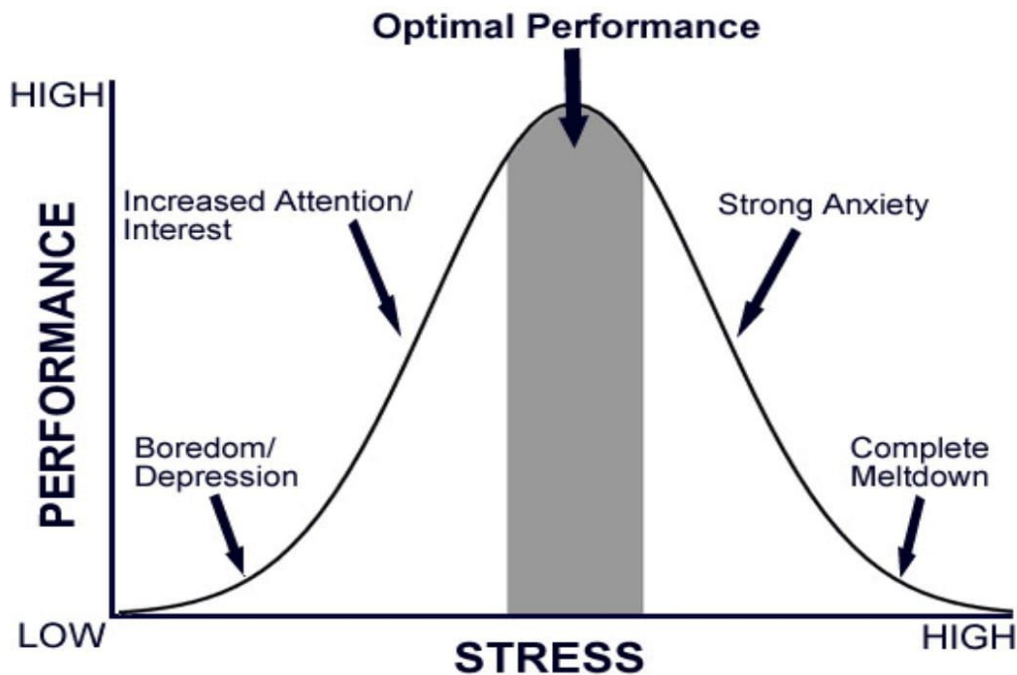


Tools for Knowledge Workers

The Effects of Stress on Performance



A fellow I know on Twitter sent me the diagram above. He did not know who created it. I did some research and as best I can determine, it is a Hebbian version of the Yerkes-Dodson law first articulated in 1908. The law postulates an empirical relationship between arousal and performance – but only up to a point. The “Hebbian” label appears to come from Donald Hebb, a Canadian psychologist who wrote a 1949 book titled *The Organization of Behavior*. Hebb depicted the relationship between arousal and performance in an inverted U similar to the one shown above. The research regarding the validity of the Yerkes-Dodson law is mixed. However, the diagram does appear to be a reasonably good fit with what many of us believe to be the effects of stress on performance. I present it here simply to make it available to a wider audience and perhaps to stimulate some interesting conversations. The fellow who sent it to me said, “I like it.” So do I.

