

Empowering Ourselves In These Tough Times

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These days you cannot pick up a paper, turn on the news or flip through the stations on the radio without hearing how awful the state of our economy is and getting worse every day - sometimes every minute.

How can we maintain some sense of optimism in the face of all this bad news? How do we not become victims of all the negativity we are bombarded with day after day?

Let's look at how we react to events in our everyday life. "Stuff" happens - how do you respond and what influences your response? There are days when we feel more in control of our lives than other days.

- } How does that impact your response to everyday events?
- } Does it make a difference if you are rested or not hungry?
- } Do you know what events frustrate you?
- } Do you know what events upset you?
- } Do you know what makes you feel less anxious?
- } Do you know what makes you feel more in charge of your life?
- } Do you consider yourself a reactive or proactive person?

Morarji Desai, former Indian Prime Minister said, *"Life at any time can become difficult. Life at any time can become easy. It all depends upon how one adjusts oneself to life."*

Resiliency and Optimism may be two coping tools we can use in these difficult times. To find out how Optimistic you are you can go to www.optimi.org to "test your O.Q. (optimism quotient)". To test your level of Resiliency you can go to www.resiliencycenter.com

This month we are going to discuss some ways that we can maintain optimism in the face of all the negative messages. We are not talking about the "Pollyanna - everything is great" optimism but the need to maintain or regain some control over our emotions and our anxiety levels in order to get through this crisis.

The first thing to understand is that we will get through this crisis. We may have to make some adjustments or learn new ways to do things, but we have all been there before and took on the challenge. If we look back through our personal history and the times in our country's history where we have been tested we begin to see how we rose to the challenge.

Why are we so Afraid?

Sometimes it is hard to understand what truly is going on in our world today. In 2006 the American Institute in Washington DC held a conference "Panic Attack: The New Precautionary Culture, the Politics of Fear, and the Risks to Innovation". Frank Furedi, a University of Kent Sociologist and author discussed trends he felt are contributing to many of us feeling we are victims of circumstances out of our control.

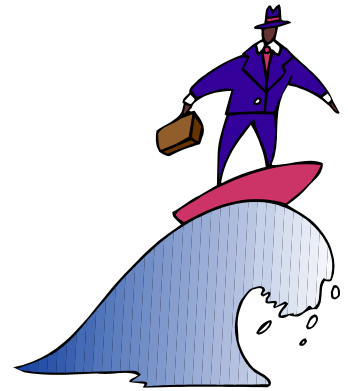
You may agree or disagree, but his ideas may make you think about our responses to tough times.

Events are represented in more dramatic fashion and Furedi feels people are no longer expected to rise above adversity or encouraged to get on with their lives. How have you responded to changes that you may be experiencing in your life?

All indications point to people living longer and healthier lives but we appear to be more worried about things that can make us sick or shorten our lives. Furedi feels this is decreasing our cultural capacity to handle uncertainty. Are you able to move in a positive direction even when you are not sure of the future?

Furedi also expresses his concern about people depending on sources outside of themselves to define who they are and how they respond to various situations. He expresses concern that people no longer have the capacity to cope and act for themselves. Who are your role models? Are they family members, teachers, coaches or bosses we have encountered in our lives? Or do you depend on alcohol or drugs, celebrities or the desire to “keep up with the Jones” no matter the cost to you?

Are you willing to take reasonable risks not knowing what the outcome may be? Are you one who will not take a risk unless you are certain of a high level of safety? For instance do you continue to contribute to your retirement fund or are you thinking about pulling your money out of the fund in light of the present economic environment.



These questions may be tough to think about but we need to remind ourselves that we are survivors and that things can get better. As we consider our own reactions to the larger events around us, realize that there is this backdrop that may be influencing us. Though we do not have control over the economy and larger world events, we do have control over ourselves and our individual responses. In other words, don't be swept away by the tidal wave, but learn how to swim in it or even surf!

How did you do?

How did you make out taking the Optimism Quiz and/or the Resiliency quiz? As a reminder: go to www.optimi.org to “test your O.Q. (optimism quotient)”. To test your level of Resiliency you can go to www.resiliencycenter.com



If you scored low on the resiliency test do not despair - we can learn resiliency!

Adaptive Learning (adaptivelearning.com) has studied resilient people for the last thirteen years. In summary they have found four strengths that resilient people share.

Avoid the Negative - Limit your exposure to the news. The bad, the gory, the sensational all sell but it is not good for your emotional health! Listen to enough news to keep yourself informed but don't search out every bad report you can find. Do what you need to do to get through these times and work hard at it. Surround yourself with positive people who are willing to look at options available in these troubled times.

Maintain your optimism - Times are tough and some days it is tougher than others to remain optimistic but the optimistic person knows that the light is at the end of the tunnel and these times will end. How you handle your situation now will affect your future. Focus on your past history when you went through tough times and reflect on how you got through it. What did you learn? Did it help you make changes in how you respond to stressful situations now?

Reach Out - Reach out to people who can be supportive to you. If you have a change in your circumstances take time to think about contacts you have made over time and reach out to them. Ask for the support of positive creative thinking people. Use these people to help you brainstorm for new avenues to pursue.

Nurturing Connections - Maintain contact with people who are supportive to you. Good friends and supportive family members are very important in tough times.

Now, let's review the coping tools to deal with stress in your life.

Although there is no quick fix or magic bullet to fix our situations there are things we can do to feel more in control of our environment. Following is a review of some coping tools:

- Recognize that you and your family are under stress. Discuss this with your family members and work together to develop some plans for becoming proactive and relying less on someone else to “fix” your situation.
- Get practical and realistic- get to the basics and address them. Find pleasure in simple things.
- Limit negative thinking - do not allow yourself to get immersed in the negativity. You can allot yourself a certain amount of time each day to wallow in negativity and then you need to let it go until next time.
- Get enough rest and eat healthy - maintain regular activity and physical exercise. This is a time when it is very easy to fall into bad habits that do not help you maintain an optimistic viewpoint.
- Find something to laugh about every day. It is difficult to be sad or bitter or angry if you have a smile on face that starts at eye level.
- Find something good everyday and share it with someone else.
- Be sure to include some “fun” activities every day. Watch a funny movie, play with your children, and get together with friends or family to enjoy each others company.
- Use your local library to get books to read, videos to rent, books on tape to listen to. Now may be the time to acquaint yourself with motivational material. (Plus it's free!)
- If you belong to a religious group now may be the time to become more involved or seek out more support from the members of the group.
- If you find you have time on your hands think about volunteering and helping others out.
- Seek out information and assistance to help you become an active participant in solving your problems.
- REMEMBER - This time may be a “Life Changer” for you and you will get through it. Talk to others from previous generations that have been through a crisis and remember they got through it just like you will.
- Don't think you cannot ask for help - it is out there for you to use.



***Call Solutions EAP at 1-800-526-3485 for assistance for all of life's challenges.
It's free, confidential and open to family members.
Check us out on-line www.solutions-eap.com***