

Watch your words.

Words don't just describe situations. They create them.

Pay attention to words you use to describe situations. Words like terrible, and horrible and awful are three (clean language) examples of words that are used all the time for just about any situation. "Tomorrow is going to be horrible." "This project is terrible."

Remember, terrible, horrible and awful are opinions. They aren't facts. But once they are used they start a pattern of circular thinking. It goes like this. I say something is terrible. I therefore feel terrible. That makes it a terrible situation. Therefore I call it terrible. And I feel terrible about it. Etc. Etc. Etc.

Even worse, there is often no discrimination between events we call terrible or horrible. Spilling ketchup on yourself is called terrible and 9/11 is called terrible. Are these two events really comparable? Really? I don't think so. Pay attention to what you are saying.

Use other words besides those to describe tough situations. How about difficult. If somebody said to you that they had two jobs for you to pick from. One was terrible and one was difficult. Do you think you would just jump at the chance to get terrible? I doubt it. Difficult implies roll up your sleeves. There is work to do. Terrible implies, "Duck", "Get outta Dodge".

Challenge is another word that is much better than terrible or horrible. I have a friend who was given six months to live 40 years ago. She had two newborn twins and a three year old. She had two potentially fatal diseases. She knew her chances were not good.

The question she asked herself every morning while she was dealing with this mess was, "How do I make today a good day." She didn't ask what had to happen in her day to make it a good day. She asked herself what she needed to do. That was her challenge. She wasn't perfect at it. Sometimes her husband had to help her find the answer to that question.

Sometimes she helped him. One thing is for sure though. She's still alive and well today. I'm not saying that her attitude alone saved her, but it sure didn't hurt. Even if she wouldn't have lived past those six months, they would have been better than a lot of people's last 40 years have been.

Here's one last alternative to terrible, etc. Opportunity. I know - easier said than done. As I mentioned earlier, James Stockdale saw his situation in a POW camp as an opportunity for him to grow as a person.

Also get more words to describe situations that are positive. Don't just use good or fun or OK. Challenging, Stimulating, Exciting, Awe inspiring are possibilities. Bring energy to your words and the situations that you like. Add passion just by your descriptions.

I am not saying that just because you use a different word to describe your situation, everything will just be fine. This isn't fantasy time. Just say a different word and poof everything is great. No!

Words have weight though. The more you use words like terrible and horrible and awful the higher the odds are that you will be weighed down by the words themselves. My friend who was sick probably never said the word challenge to describe the illnesses she faced. She approached it that way however. She dealt with it as a challenge. "What do I need to do?"

As I said, she had her moments though that weren't so good. She got scared. She got down. She could feel defeated from time to time. None of us are saints and we're not perfect. We can get discouraged even using better words. We need each other. It might be a husband or wife or partner or child or parent.

To sum up:

Lean toward difficult rather than terrible when describing bad situations. I'm sure Stockdale would have said his situation was pretty bad. In fact the Stockdale Paradox is about being honest about the situation. Just don't use words that make it worse and undercut your resolve.

His situation was pretty bad. But even if he used the word terrible he dealt with it as if it were difficult. He had strategies. He didn't just duck. He rolled up his sleeves. Look to see something as a challenge rather than a curse. Blaming God or seeing yourself as cursed isn't going to help. Ask yourself, "What do I need to do?"

And most importantly look for opportunity in the middle of a mess. .

Power is about choices.

If you don't see the choices, you don't see the power.

If you don't see choices, you usually don't look further

For many, it is easier to be a victim than to acknowledge choices.

**“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space
is our power to
choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our
freedom.”**

Don't make yourself a slave.

When you give away your power to someone or something you become their slave.

George Gurdjieff, the philosopher I mentioned earlier stated that most of us are slaves. Other people and situations have control over us. Our happiness depends on things outside of ourselves. He said freedom is what we should strive for. The freedom that Gurdjieff is talking about, I believe, centers around the issue of power - power of the mind and the spirit. If I am giving you power over my emotional state, I am your slave. If I give power to an event as to how I will feel, I am a slave to that event.

Bringing the jerk home from work.

Here is a real life example of being a slave that a lot of us fall into. Did you ever go home from work mad at someone?

That's real smart isn't it. It's not bad enough that you work with this person, you're bringing him home in the car! "C'mon jerk. Get in the car. I'm taking you home." "C'mon jerk, have some supper with us. You can have the seat of honor." "C'mon jerk, you can sit on my lap while we watch TV." "C'mon jerk, you're going to sleep with us tonight. I'll make room between me and the spouse."

Now this guy might be a jerk.

But who's the dope?

You!!!

Who's the slave?

You!!!

Leave the jerk at work.

He isn't stressing you out. You are.