

TRY WISER NOT HARDER

When I don't want to try harder anymore

ANNA DeLong, LCSW, CEAP, NPT-C, Mindfulness and Compassion Coach



Nearly 30 years ago, while at UVA, one of the pediatricians with whom I worked was shaking her head commenting on how she could never ‘do’ a role like mine on the interdisciplinary team. (I was the clinical social worker serving parents and children seen by a Pediatric Specialty team). She said she realized she could never go into psychiatry the moment she discovered “insight wasn’t therapy”. That made us both laugh. It’s so true. How many times do we realize we could actually write a book about all the ways we get stuck in our lives? Likely devoting several chapters to what we need to do to get unstuck. And yet, we often remain caught in our unhelpful habitual patterns, limiting our own sense of joy and appreciation for this gift of life. It seems it isn’t so much what we “know” is true as it is how we handle this wisdom that determines whether we will truly be happy. **It’s much more about how we are inside our own head, unconsciously, that influences the moment to moment choices we make impacting our overall experience and perspective.**

I used to believe if something wasn’t going well, I needed to just try harder. Now I know that often isn’t true. If we are living a life that isn’t allowing space and time to embrace the gifts of life’s moments as they unfold before us, even in the midst of

difficulty; If we are moving so quickly or frantically that we don't have time to nourish the seeds of compassion within ourselves and our relationships, something is wrong. **Even if we began with beautiful intentions, a chronic, frantic pace will typically disconnect us from our most important intention in the moment and deprives us of the experience of making meaningful connections.**

After having three children in four years while working full time, I often felt as if I was walking through very deep water, fully clothed complete with a wool coat and cement boots...my head tilted back to aid in breathing through a straw. It seemed the only thing I was doing really well was teaching my children how to hurry - the opposite of my intention. It felt terrible. I thought if I stopped at all, I would only get further behind. It didn't occur to me that **a pause and Re-BOOT could broaden my perspective and enable me to see options and choices in a way that could transform a victim mindset to one of self-empowerment.** And yet, **It is the pause and Re-Boot that helped me replace 'trying harder' with 'trying WISER'.**

When I finally made a decision to pause and re-boot, instead of dragging my fully clothed body through the river struggling to just breathe, I felt as if I was able to rest on a rock overlooking the beauty of the river and the surrounding meadows. I noticed gifts for all the senses: the wildflowers, butterflies, birds, buzzing insects, shades of grasses waving with the breeze, the sound of the water over the rocks, leaves rustling on the trees, and the warmth of the sun on my skin. I am so acutely aware of how different everything feels within my life when I am immersed in the river with the boots on and how meaningful and beautiful life is from the rock. The pressure, pain, or grief may still be there, but there is also a sense of equanimity, clarity - a calm abiding. From the rock I notice changes deep within me. I remember my life, my body, and my breath are all gifts. My sense of entitlement and sense of wanting things to be different than they are diminishes. My overall sense of gratitude and appreciation for what 'is' blossoms. My awareness of empowered choices and options increases. My focus shifts away from what I don't like, or what is outside of my control and I can see more of what is within my control and in keeping with my goal.

I think living requires the use of many gears. I use higher ones to navigate the world around me at times, certainly to understand the language and pace of my current culture. And if I really want to live my life more compassionately and wisely, time spent with a lower, slower gear, (such as is experienced from 'the rock') is required to help me listen deeply and see clearly. After a pause and re-boot on the rock, I may decide to return to the river; however this time perhaps I'll lose the cement boots and use my kayak that is tied next to the dock. This time I'll 'try wiser' instead of harder.

It is now nearly 30 years later, and current neuroscience research validates and explains the importance of spending time like this to pause on your symbolic, (perhaps even literal) rock by the river. *I invite you to explore time on the rock for yourself. And in so doing, May you remember and be guided by your most important Intention; May you remember and honor your own innate goodness; May you resolve to find ways to attend to own needs kindly every day; May you have realistic and manageable goals; May you forgive yourself for mistakes made and things left undone and remember to welcome yourself to the human race of imperfect souls. May you be free of self-doubt and embrace your goals with courage and confidence.*

Anna

PS, feel free to reach out to request an appointment if you would like to learn more about what 'time on the rock' might look like in your life.

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