

How To Keep Going When You Want It All To Go Away

By
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How long will the Damocles Sword of the pandemic hang over our heads? As the days drag on, will it threaten to upend us indefinitely? Even though we try to avoid thinking about the troubling possibilities, they keep creeping into our minds, creating more stress, clouding our ability to stay focused, and leaving us irritable, angry, less effective—and tired.

It's not a pretty picture, not one we could possibly imagine ever facing. So, when we're confused and uncertain about the future, what are we to do? Here are some thoughts about that bothersome question:

1. Don't listen to yourself

Why does it always happen when we're trying to get to sleep at night? But that's the way it is. What's so upsetting is that the person who causes the anxiety and does the damage is the one who lives inside our head. We are never our own best friend in the middle of the night.

So, stop listening to yourself. It's time for a personal fact-checker, but neither Alexa nor Siri qualify. This is a job for someone you trust. "This is what's concerning me. Am I on track or off the rails?"

2. Look for new possibilities

The good news is that life is not a matter of choosing the right fake Zoom background to convince ourselves (and others) that we're more than just OK. It amounts to more than that.

Recently, an editor sent me one of my sales articles. He had kept it until he found the right place for it. Recognizing that it had been around for about a year, he asked if I would look it over to see if it needed updating. Well, my first reaction was less than positive. But, swallowing my pride, I read it and was shocked at what I found! In a relatively short time, the world changed dramatically and the article needed updating to reflect what had transpired.

People are no different, so it may be time to ask yourself a tough question, "Am I dated?" Think about it. What can you do to "update" yourself? Sure, you may know your

job “backwards and forwards,” but that doesn’t count anymore. Focus on figuring out to revise your performance. How can you make what you do more relevant? What can you do to enhance your value? Think about the possibilities.

3. Get better acquainted with yourself

If you really want to get to know yourself as you really are, you might want to spend time in Wyoming. But be prepared, Wyomingites aren’t subtle. They don’t tip-toe around; they’re not afraid to tell it like it is, no matter who you are. Having lived there, I speak from experience. For example, I recall the memorable words of a motorcycle-riding English professor from the UW: “If you can’t write it, you don’t know it.” Got it!

Here’s the point. If you want to get better acquainted with yourself, jot down life experiences from your early memories to what’s happening now. Don’t just remember them, get them on paper. Write them down as they come to mind. Ideas never come all at once. If you really want to know yourself, start writing. You may like what you discover.

4. Be ready for the unexpected

How many times in the last six months have you heard someone say, perhaps wistfully, “I’ll sure be glad when life gets back to the way it was.” Even though we may not have said it out loud, most everyone has harbored the thought more than a few times. It’s just too much to let ourselves think that going back is not an option.

If we’ve learned anything from the pandemic, it’s that we should learn to keep an eye out for surprises and the unexpected, or, as the slang would have it, they come from “out of left field.”

Even though we may not like to think that everything is up for grabs because of the pandemic, it is: the way we live, work, play, learn, shop, think, do business, and behave. It’s all changing and will surely continue to evolve. Keeping an eye out for the unpredictable will make living easier and more rewarding.

5. Change the picture of yourself

Add continuing uncertainty to the pervasive impact of COVID-19 and it’s more than enough to distort our picture of ourselves and crush our self-confidence. It’s too much to let ourselves think about what could possibly be coming next.

Perhaps not. How we happen to view ourselves is not a given or chiseled in stone, unless, we allow ourselves to look at it that way. In a wonderful essay, “Homo Sapiens: The Unfinished Animal,” physicist George Stanciu, Ph.D., writes, “Nature gives human beings no specific way of life—no fixed occupation, no fitting dress, no appropriate emotional profile. It’s as if nature grew tired when she fashioned *Homo sapiens* and left this one species unfinished.”

And that's good news! In spite of everything, what we do with what we're given has not been written or handed to us. Our story is unfinished—and it's in our hands.

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