

Surviving to June and Beyond

STEPS FOR PERSONAL CARE

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Survival appears to be the focus in our current environment of turmoil and uncertainty. Ideally we want more than mere survival but it's difficult to progress beyond that if we are trapped in thoughts of meeting basic needs.

Although we can't change all things happening around us, we do control our attitude and reactions toward them. Looking realistically at a situation and our options, we can decide to create positive outcomes to compensate for the negative ones. However, before we can release our creative energies, we must actually understand what is happening to us.

Listen To Your Body

Until you learn to do this, listening to family and friends will help. "What's wrong with you today?" "Get up on the wrong side of the bed?" "You don't seem yourself, anything bothering you?" Do these queries sound familiar? In case you hadn't noticed before then, now is the time to stop and take an inventory of things happening in your life. Sometimes we are so busy looking after other things that we don't notice their impact on us. Listen to your body. Notice the signals it is sending and start paying attention to them. Are you feeling tired, overwhelmed with everything that has to be done? Is your energy or interest level lower than normal for you? Are you irritable, less tolerant of yourself and others, or overreacting to situations? Do you have new, or recurring aches and pains (head, stomach, chest, back, legs)? Do you want to withdraw from the world and minimize contact with everyone?

These are all indicators that things are not running smoothly. They are attempts to get your attention and have you make changes to improve the situation. The earlier you recognize these signals and take action, the less negative their impact will be on you.

Interpret Messages and Count Costs

What does all this physical and emotional information mean? You be the judge. Analyze what's currently going on, how things have changed, over what time frame and what new stressors have been introduced into your life or environment. Another birthday, new family member, job insecurity, physical illness, interpersonal conflict, financial strain and the hundreds of other issues you identify can each be demanding mental and physical energy with or without your conscious awareness. Determine your issues, then quantify their impact on you. For example, maybe the greatest influence is fall out from educational reform. How much is it costing you to think about and deal with the consequences? Is it affecting your health (eating, sleeping, recreational habits)? Is it interfering with personal, family or professional relationships? Does it present new financial problems because of job loss or school change? How satisfied are you with the way you are handling your issues?

By calculating the cumulative costs of these issues, you may decide that it is finally time to take some cost-cutting measures of your own!

Re-establish Personal Priorities

What is most important to you? What in your life do you want to protect and at what expense? You know you can't have everything so what are you willing/not willing to do without? There are serious decisions to be made and delaying such decisions can actually increase the costs. Daily we make decisions about how to react in relationships, which parts of the curriculum to emphasize, and where and how to spend our time, energy and money. These decisions are based on our values and what we feel we are responsible for doing. We make choices continuously in order to meet our priorities. If there's a family concert on the evening of parent-teacher interviews --; we make a choice. If we want to save for a summer holiday but enjoy eating out and going to movies --; we make a choice. If we're trying to improve personal and family relationships while trying to spend more time on work commitments --; we make choices. Unfortunately, sometimes we make the choices thinking in a rigid "all or nothing" manner, or without thoroughly considering the consequences. Frequently we make choices because of the consequences. We can handle a family upset because of missing a concert but cannot accept a professional reprimand for missing parent-teacher interviews.

Seek Creative Alternatives

You aren't "supposed" to have all the answers, but for your own health and peace of mind you need to feel certain that you have done what you can, to find the best answers for you. Generally that means involving others in collecting and

processing information, generating options, considering consequences, and planning and supporting action. Sharing the "burden" can yield very positive results.

When salary, job security, repayment of student loans or raising a family have become significant financially, many teachers have discovered that they have very marketable skills and qualifications and have changed jobs or started their own businesses. When time has been the most constricting factor for other teachers, they have used the opportunity to incorporate lifestyle changes, relinquish some responsibilities or share tasks with others.

Plan --; Then Take Action

Know the changes you want to make. (Knowing where you want to go makes the planning and the journey much simpler!) Start with things that aren't too difficult to achieve. This builds a sense of accomplishment and encourages greater challenges. When encountering big changes, or ones which you expect to have "significant" impact on you, don't try to deal with all aspects at once.

Break down your planned response into small, manageable, sequential steps. Be sure to acknowledge each step achieved, since looking at the progress gained can be more uplifting and motivating than considering the distance yet to travel.

Change will happen with or without our approval, support or participation but its impact is somewhat dependent on our expectations, attitudes and adaptation skills. We can modify our thinking and behaviors to enhance coping abilities and take a proactive approach to change. How much are you willing to change in this equation? (Situation + Personal Skills + Attitude + Personal Reactions = Impact.)

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