



Getting Through Tough Times

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The headlines shout at us "The worst failure... Not since the Depression... Never before in our history." Of course you're feeling upset. These are horrible things to hear. So how can we survive this economic crisis and catastrophic predictions of the future?

Your EAP has gathered this helpful collection of proven ideas to help you weather the tough times. And remember... you can call Employee Assistance of the Pacific for more help that is confidential, free and convenient.

Turn Inward for Answers

In tough times, turn inward. You have already been a pretty good friend to yourself during difficult circumstances; your past experiences are your track record. So when you hear the next piece of bad news, turn inward, you'll find your best ally and source of strength, right inside.

Turn inward. In tough times, look back, look around and look inside.

The first step is to look back. Hawaii has weathered economic downturns before. And you're still here. So the first step in your survival kit is to remember where you were and what happened to you. Did you lose money, your equilibrium, a job? Think back on your circumstances. Now consider what you used to get yourself through those crises. You may have suffered, but chances are pretty good you found a way to regroup. Acknowledge the ability you have to come back. You have innate survival skills. Every human does. You survived other economic crises; you



can survive this one too.

The next step involves your own unique circumstances in your life. It doesn't matter if you are 20 or 70 years old. You have survived difficult challenges. They could be overcoming your teenage years, failing a big exam, surviving a divorce, the loss of someone you love, loss of a job, career or business. If you are alive on this earth and you interact with society you have overcome and survived challenges along the way. Maybe you are resilient. Maybe you are determined and know how to persevere. Perhaps you can hold on to faith and hope. Maybe you are creative. Whatever tools and attributes you used to weather your own personal crises, you can use to help you now. These are your survival tools. Maybe it's time to remind yourself they are there, they are uniquely yours and they work.

Another effort you can make for yourself during this time is to practice gratitude. This means looking around your life and appreciating what you have at this moment. Maybe you have a family and you are grateful for them. Maybe you have good friends. Take stock in what is in your world right now, not what could happen or what you could lose; just appreciating what is with you right now. When you appreciate what is, you will not have the room or space in your thoughts to think about what might happen. This is a sure fire way to get you out of your worries. (Continued on Page 2)

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Lifestyle Stress Busters

Here are some goals that can make a real difference in the level of stress you experience, and the quality of life you enjoy:

Maintain an Organized Living Space

A cluttered environment can literally drain your energy and cause additional stress! Conversely, a simple and soothing environment can be a haven where you can escape from the stressors in your life. Working on decluttering your home, getting organized about cleaning, or even practicing Feng Shui are all ways you can work toward the goal of having a beautiful and organized living space.

Learn to Organize Your Time

By keeping a schedule, learning to say no to excessive demands on your time, and utilizing shortcuts in your life, you'll be less frantic, and have more time to do the things that energize and de-stress you. You'll also have more time to do things that you enjoy in life.

Cultivate a Supportive Social Circle

Those with a supportive social circle, or even just one close friend or partner to talk to and lean on in times of crisis, enjoy healthier, less stressful lives. (And they have more fun!) If you make the commitment to meet more people, and better develop the relationships you have, you'll find that the payoff is more than worth the effort.

Take Care of Your Body

If your body is healthy and in good repair, you're better able to handle stressors in your life. However, an unhealthy body can cause great amounts of additional stress. Eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep are all good ways to take care of your body and make stress management easier.

Nurture Your Spiritual Life

While there are many spiritual paths, research shows that those who have made the journey find greater relief from stress and enjoy better health and happier lives.

Adapted from Elizabeth Scott, M.S.

"Changes to your life style can make a real difference in your stress level."

Turn Inward for Answers (Con't from page 1)

And the last step is TALK TO SOMEONE. This is a gift each of us can give ourselves. When we hold on to our worries they turn into stress in our bodies. Sometimes they come out in angry outbursts or feeling overwhelmed. Sometimes we get lethargic and depressed. So how do we avoid these symptoms? We talk to someone. When we talk about our worries we release them so they don't stay in our head and fester or shift to our body and shut us down. The act of sharing your thoughts, especially your worries, helps you release the stress and this is healing. It also gives you a chance to use your own personal survival tools we talked about earlier. When you release your worry thoughts, you make room for your resilience, determination, creativity and hope. So who do you talk to? Anyone you trust. Talk to a professional counselor at your EAP - Employee Assistance of the Pacific. Talk to your partner. Talk to a friend. Talk to a mentor. Talk to a colleague. Talk to someone in your faith. Just talk about it.

Adapted from Linda J. Nusbaum MA. MFT



Talk to someone ... it can truly help.

When Our Thinking Causes Problems

When we are very stressed, particularly if we become anxious or depressed, our ability to think clearly may be affected. People can easily feel less capable or weaker than they truly are, and think that their situation is much worse than it really is.

These kinds of subtle twists in thinking can be difficult to identify. When one has a thought such as "I just cannot do anything right" or "this is hopeless," he or she may take it for granted that the thought is true. This is not necessarily so because people's thoughts can be completely untrue.

An exaggerated, inaccurate thought such as "I'm totally worthless," may be believed because the feeling behind it is true; it reflects a true feeling of despair or hopelessness. It is too easy to accept distorted thinking that goes along with an emotion and act as if the thought is true.

People sometimes deny that their thinking is affected by their feelings. Believing distorted or negative thoughts makes it more difficult to work effectively to address one's problems. If individuals really believe that everything is hopeless and that they will never do anything right, they are less capable of wisely judging their situation in order to improve it. If we are depressed and feeling hopeless enough, sometimes it seems easier to throw up our hands in despair than to deal with the real problems. The only way to know if a thought is accurate is to look directly at the thought as it occurs, often with the help of an objective listener, and to examine it.

Adapted from Steve Bressert, Ph.D



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Taming the Stress of Overspending

We all can benefit from gaining control over our spending habits. Not only does taming the urge to overspend help to keep shrinking budgets in line but the freedom from compulsive buying is a way of personally empowering ourselves and reducing stress. If you are spending more than you should, take heart – and take action. The following are several strategies to help.

Keep a money spending log. Write down not only what you have spent, but how you were feeling before you made the purchase – and after the purchase as well. What you learn about your motivation to spend can be very useful in planning for change.

Shop Alone. Shopping with friends (especially friends who love to shop) is a surefire way to override your spending budget. Most of us are somewhat more likely to buy something from a store if we are with someone who's buying something.

Bring Cash. If there are certain times when you tend to spend, such as lunch breaks or after work, take your credit card and debit card out of your wallet so that you only have cash on you when you head into a store. This will obviously limit what you can buy with the money on hand, and if there's something that you like that is not within your cash limit, it gives you some time to think it over with a clear head before making a spontaneous purchase.

Take a Time Out. If you see something you must have, commit to thinking it over for 48 to 72 hours before you buy it. After that time, you may understand your need for the item more clearly, or it may have lost its luster.

Declare a Break. Take two weeks, or even better, a month, and only purchase what you truly need. It takes self-discipline but you will be amazed at that you learn about yourself.

"If you are spending more than you should, take heart—and take action."

Relaxation Techniques for Stressful Times

Here are a number of useful physical relaxation techniques that can help you reduce muscle tension and manage the effects of the stress on your body. This is particularly important if you need to think clearly and perform precisely when you are under pressure.

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple but very effective method of relaxation. It is a core component of everything from the "take ten deep breaths" approach to calming someone down, right through to yoga relaxation and meditation. It works well in conjunction with other relaxation techniques such as Progressive Muscular Relaxation, relaxation imagery and meditation to reduce stress.

To use the technique, take a number of deep breaths and relax your body further with each breath. That's all there is to it!

The Relaxing Sigh

During the day, you probably catch yourself sighing or yawning. This is generally a sign that you are not getting enough oxygen. Sighing and yawning are the body's way of remedying the situation. A sigh is often accompanied by a sense that things are not quite as they should be and a feeling of tension. Since a sigh actually does release a bit of this tension, you can practice sighing at will as a means of relaxing.



Learning techniques to calm the mind and body can be invaluable in times of stress.

The "Relaxation Response"

In a series of experiments into various popular meditation techniques, Dr. Herbert Benson established that these techniques had a very real effect on reducing stress and controlling the fight-or-flight response. Direct effects included deep relaxation, slowed heartbeat and breathing, and reduced oxygen consumption.

This is something that you can do for yourself by following these steps:

- Sit quietly and comfortably.
- Close your eyes.
- Start by relaxing the muscles of your feet and work up your body relaxing muscles.
- Focus your attention on your breathing. Breathe in deeply and then let your breath out. Count your breaths, and say the number of the breath as you let it out (this gives you something to do with your mind, helping you to avoid distraction). Do this for ten to twenty minutes..

Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR)

Progressive Muscular Relaxation is useful for relaxing your body when your muscles are tense.

The idea behind PMR is that you tense up a group of muscles so that they are as tightly contracted as possible. Hold them in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds. Then, relax the muscles to their previous state. Finally, consciously relax the muscles even further so that you are as relaxed as possible.

By tensing your muscles first, you will probably find that you are able to relax your muscles more than would be the case if you tried to relax your muscles directly.

Experiment with PMR by forming a fist, and clenching your hand as tight as you can for a few seconds. Then relax your hand to its previous tension, and then consciously relax it again so that it is as loose as possible. You should feel deep relaxation in your hand muscles.

Letting Go of Tension

Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet on the floor.

Breathe in deeply into your abdomen and say to yourself, "Breathe in relaxation". Let yourself pause before your exhale.

Breathe out from your abdomen and say to yourself, "Breathe out tension". Pause before you inhale.

Use each exhalation as a moment to become aware of any tension in your body.

Use each exhalation as an opportunity to let go of tension.

You may find it helpful to use your imagination to picture or feel the relaxation entering and the tension leaving your body.

Deep breathing is a simple but very effective method of relaxation. It is a core component of everything from the "take ten deep breaths" approach to calming someone down, right through to yoga relaxation and meditation.

Finding Strength and Well Being Through Spirituality

Spirituality is the way you find meaning, hope, comfort and inner peace in your life. Many people find spirituality through religion. Some find it through music, art or a connection with nature. Others find it in their values and principles.

According to a national Gallup survey, nearly 80 percent of Americans say that the statement 'I receive a great deal of comfort and support from my religious beliefs' is completely or mostly true. A random survey of the U.S. population one week after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, found that 90 percent of Americans turned to religion in order to cope with the stress of these events.

How is spirituality related to health and coping with stress?

No one really knows for sure how spirituality is related to health and well being. However, it seems the body, mind and spirit are connected. The health of any one of these elements seems to affect the health of the others.

Some research shows that things such as positive beliefs, comfort and strength gained from religion, meditation and prayer can contribute to healing and a sense of well-being. Improving your spiritual health may not completely eliminate stress or cure an illness, but it may help you feel better, prevent some health problems and help you cope with stress or illness



There are two distinct components to the spiritual pathway. The first is to establish and maintain a spiritual practice. The second is to allow our spirituality to permeate our lives on a moment to moment basis. Although we can experience spiritual growth by doing either the first or the second, the combination of the two is really the key to a full spiritual life. Just as with most of our life activities, we must go through the steps of practice and integration to really become accomplished at anything we do.

The muscles of the soul include, but are not limited to courage, faith, humor, patience, compassion, imagination, humbleness, forgiveness, intuition, creativity, optimism, honesty and love. These are the resources people draw upon in times of crisis and catastrophe. They are not gifts for a chosen few. They are birthrights for each and every one of us. But, like

our physical muscles, they will weaken if not used. And while they will never disappear, in a weakened or inactive state, they will be as ineffective as the muscles of a sedentary person attempting a marathon. Spiritual health is flexing these muscles and feeling the strength they provide when needed.

How can I improve my spiritual health?

If you want to improve your spiritual health, you may want to try the following ideas. However, remember that everyone is different, so what works for others may not work for you.

- ◇ Identify the things in your life that give you a sense of inner peace, comfort, strength, love and connection. Look for ways to bring them into your life more often. Set aside time every day to do the things that help you spiritually. These may include:
 - praying, attending religious services, meditating, singing devotional songs, reading inspirational books, taking nature walks, having quiet time for contemplation, doing yoga, doing community service or volunteer work.
- ◇ Be quiet. Take time for silence every day, even if it's just before you go to sleep.
- ◇ Practice gratitude.
- ◇ Be open. Spiritual experiences can happen anywhere at any time.
- ◇ Practice being non-judgmental and having an open mind.
- ◇ Find like minded spiritual seekers and spend time with them.
- ◇ Be receptive to pain or times of sorrow. It is often in these times when we discover how spirituality can help us cope.
- ◇ Practice forgiveness.
- ◇ Allow yourself to believe in things that aren't easily explainable .

Tough Times Can Affect all of the Family

It's no surprise that relationships may be challenged during financially-trying times. Losing a job and finding oneself suddenly unemployed often leaves a person at loose ends, their identity and sense of purpose severely shaken. Even without a job loss, struggling with tight budgets and worries about the future bring new needs around communication. Here are a few points to keep in mind:



Children may need a parent's extra attention to help them feel secure in tough times

- Although the adults may experience an unwanted and unexpected job loss or economic downturn as a financial challenge, children in the household may interpret these as a loss of emotional safety and stability. There are ways to validate everyone's experience and address each member's needs and concerns.
- Any change to a family, especially if it is unanticipated, can feel like a trauma or a shocking loss.
- Lower self esteem can shorten fuses and diminish patience during times of stress - just when we need more empathy, listening, and negotiating.
- Roles may need to be re-defined and there may be a learning curve and time required to change family dynamics.

The goal for every family is to encourage the healthy expression of feelings and allow for different styles of healing. Once again, talking to a professional counselor or objective friend about the loss and how to move ahead is a wise decision.

Help is Available at Your EAP

This can be a time of serious stress for you and your family. Employee Assistance of the Pacific is ready to provide neutral, free and confidential support.

The counselors at EAP are all professionals who are experts at providing you with ideas and resources for dealing with the pressures that life sometimes presents.

You don't need to have a mental health problem to see an EAP counselor.

You do not need to use your medical insurance and there is no charge to you for these sessions.

The EAP benefit is confidential. No information is shared with your employer, including your name, unless you give permission to do so.

You can call the EAP directly to make an appointment. EAP Honolulu offices are on Beretania Street near Ward Avenue. There are also EAP counselors on all Neighbor Islands.

Employee Assistance of
the Pacific



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