

# THRIVING

A JOURNAL OF WELL-BEING from  
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## Are You Living Your Life on a Treadmill?

**D**o you work hard but feel like you've accomplished little or nothing at the end of the day?

Do the fruits of your labor leave you wanting more?

Do you find yourself wondering, "Is this is all there is to life?"

If so, chances are you've been living as if you're on an endless treadmill.

Here are a few useful ways to further investigate:

1. Do you often feel overwhelmed and find it difficult to take action? Perhaps you're no longer interested in trying anything new. Maybe your actions throughout the day are on "autopilot."

2. Has it become more and more difficult to make decisions? Our modern world can be overwhelming, and choices seem to get more complex. Have you started to simply ignore your challenges, hoping they'll go away?

3. Has tiredness become a constant companion? Whether it's due to lack of sleep or just having less get-up-and-go, this is about more than aging. There's a growing feeling of depleted energy.

If you answered "yes" to many of the questions above, take heart. Awareness is the first critical step to feeling better. Overwhelm, indecision and exhaustion serve as useful signals telling you that your life is out of balance and that something needs to change, that it's time to feel more excited about your life.

**How can you step off the treadmill, regain equilibrium and a sense of positive and fruitful motion?**

Read on for a decision-making process

that can reduce overwhelm, clarify your decisions and reenergize you:

**Sort your decisions into 3 categories: "Yes," "No" and "Maybe."**

Should you, for example, take on that extra assignment at work? If your immediate answer is No, honor it. Trust your instincts.

What about the vacation you've been wanting for years? Probably the Yes pile, right?

Without thinking about how each thing is going to happen, or what the consequences might be, go through your list of things you need to decide about, and sort.

**If it's neither Yes or No, put it in the Maybe pile.**

The Maybe pile is usually filled with things you're uncertain about, and is the category that seems to be the biggest and bogs you down the most.

Here's the kicker: Your Maybe pile is very likely an extension of your No pile. Big Maybe piles are only overwhelming if you think of them as Yesses—or "shoulds."

**Just say "NO."**

Until you're clear that you've taken care of all the Yesses in your life, everything else is a No. It's that simple.

Working from a small, contained Yes pile helps you focus and let go of "what ifs." Finally, the overwhelm starts to go away.

A simple decision-making process like the above can be all it takes to reduce tension, help you breathe more deeply and gradually, and give you more energy. \*

## 10 Things to Stop Tolerating

*Tolerations are a drain on life energy and distract you from your life purpose. Here's a list of 10 behaviors and situations to stop tolerating.*

**1. Unkind words or behavior.** If you've been putting up with people speaking disrespectfully to you, some work on your self-esteem may be in order.

**2. Poor work/life balance.** It's essential for health and happiness not to let work take priority over home and family.

**3. Unhappiness in your job.** These tolerations might include disrespectful clients, bosses or coworkers. What is one action that you can take right now to shift the situation?

**4. Clutter.** Take five minutes each day to put things in order. Someone else's mess? Have an honest conversation about the problem.

**5. House and car repairs.** Make it a habit to repair things quickly. You might be saving yourself from a bigger problem (and bill).

**6. Lack of respect for time.** Communicate honestly about the impact of other people's lateness. Take inventory of your awareness of others' time, if needed.

**7. Poor wellness habits.** Don't give in to bad habits. Being proactive about your health now can prevent larger health issues in the future.

**8. Obligations.** Your wishes are important. Don't want to attend the work party for a coworker you never bonded with? That's okay.

**9. Financial problems.** Use an online budget system like Mint.com to keep yourself financial fit.

**10. Negativity.** Try listing five things in your life for which you have gratitude right now. \*

# A Letter From

*Margaret Hood Black*



Into each life come times of adversity, challenges that need to be faced. Finding the "silver lining" in so-called negative events isn't always easy. Yet adversity can serve you in positive ways. The page 3 article offers some useful techniques to help you find that silver lining when troubles land on your doorstep.

Keeping up with all our responsibilities in these busy times can sometimes lead to the feeling that we are living life on a treadmill, rather than enjoying the varied, balanced, and joyful life we all deserve. If you find yourself stuck in life-sapping, repetitive behavior, the front-page article offers some tips to reenergize your life.

Putting up with bad habits and belittling behavior (in ourselves and from those around us) can put a real drain on life energy. The Top 10 in this issue takes a look at some situations and behaviors we may need to stop tolerating and tips on how to change them.

Also in this issue: our quiz asks How Emotionally Resilient Are You? And finally, the article on page 4 offers some ideas on how to raise compassionate kids (and do some great parent-child bonding in the process!).

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have any questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

May this season bring a new freedom in all your communications and a blossoming of the dreams you have for your life.

## How Emotionally Resilient Are You?



Emotional resilience is the ability to successfully cope with change or misfortune. Even when afraid, resilient people respond to life's challenges with courage and emotional stamina.

While we can't always control what life brings, we can use adversity as an opportunity for growth. Respond True or False to the following statements to discover how well you cope with life's many challenges.

### True False

#### Set 1

- 1. When bad things happen, I think "why me?" I feel fear and self-pity; I want to find someone to blame.
- 2. When I feel overwhelmed by negative emotions,, I overeat or drink too much alcohol, or do other things I know aren't good for me.
- 3. I don't trust I can handle adversity by myself, nor do I have supportive people I can truly count on in a crisis.
- 4. Even when my life seems stable, I worry that some kind of misfortune is around the corner. I also have a tendency to create catastrophes out of the little things that happen.
- 5. I find it hard to feel faith when bad things happen to good people. I feel despairing, hopeless and unable to move forward.

#### Set 2

- 1. I handle everything better when I take good care of myself. Exercising raises my endorphins; eating right and sleeping well gives me more physical, mental and emotional stamina; and setting aside time for play and positive connections makes me feel more joyful and optimistic.
- 2. I have faith in my ability to handle life's challenges. At the same time, I know the importance of having loving, supportive people to help me face difficulties, large and small.
- 3. Even when faced with misfortune, I look for the "silver lining."I believe that ultimately there's a positive opportunity from which I can learn and grow.
- 4. I have a strong sense of meaning and purpose in my life that helps me move forward despite any obstacles.
- 5. I'm very persistent. Even when I get knocked down, I trust myself to eventually get back up.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to learn some effective ways to develop more emotional resilience. You can strengthen your resilience by becoming more emotionally self-aware, improving your mood with exercise, good diet, play and laughter, building self-reliance and a strong support network, and by developing perseverance, purpose and a more positive attitude.

Please call if you'd like support in exploring this further. \*

## When Bad is Good: Finding Meaning in "Negative" Events

**T**here's a Taoist story of an old farmer whose horse inexplicably ran away. His neighbors said, "What bad luck!" to which he replied, "Perhaps."

The next day, the horse returned, bringing with it a wild horse. The farmer's son tried to ride it, fell, and broke his leg. Once again, the neighbors sent their sympathy: "How terrible this is." "Perhaps," the farmer said.

The following day, military officials came to the village to draft every young man into the army. With his leg broken, the farmer's son was spared from service.

There's always more than one way to look at what life brings you, and for every event that seems negative there is a way to reframe it so that you can see the positive. And that can be a very good thing: your experiences become more meaningful, purposeful and valuable when you are able to recognize the gift contained in adversity.

The trouble is that, during the time you are experiencing adversity it's often challenging, if not impossible, to see the proverbial silver lining.

**So, how do you find the silver lining when troubles arrive at your doorstep?**

### See the opposite.

Every day may not be good, but there is good to be found in every day—and a hidden gift in all our experiences. Search for the positive interpretation of the event.

Doing this might, at first, seem alien to you, but thinking outside of your initial interpretation of the event, and learning to be proficient at finding meaning in the challenges that come your way, is an excellent exercise in expanding your view of what's possible.

### Ask yourself lots of questions.

Adversity can serve you in positive ways, and one of the best ways to open yourself up and leverage negative experiences is by asking questions like:

- How can I use this experience to learn (and change) something about myself?



Positive or negative, our experiences are our guides and teachers, and can help us, if we pay attention to the lessons, to improve the quality of our lives.

- How could this negative experience affect me in a positive way?

This can be a challenging question to ask when you feel stuck in the middle of an uncomfortable situation. But being a partner with your pain allows you to open up to the beneficent possibilities instead of merely wallowing in the negativity.

- How will this make me a stronger person?

It's not about handling difficult circumstances better than others (a mere ego boost), but how an expanded perspective empowers you to be a more capable and resilient spouse, parent, employee, entrepreneur, etc.

- How does this negative event (and my reaction to it) reflect my life purpose?

Sometimes, what we initially perceive as being an obstacle is actually a guide changing our course and steering us to our true path.

- What's the opportunity in the negative experience?

Personal/professional growth? Developing a thicker skin? Service to others? Connection? A call to adventure? A mindset shift? Reassessing negative situations means converting them into something productive.

### Be grateful.

*The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes. ~ William James*

If not for the negative event itself, be grateful for the insight or lesson learned.

Being present in the moment and appreciating all aspects of your life can act as a calming salve when times get rough.

And remember: finding the silver lining in every cloud doesn't mean ignoring feelings associated with the event—quite the opposite. It means acknowledging and experiencing those feelings fully AND leveraging them to your advantage.

Giving meaning to events, both positive and negative ones, is empowering. A positive life skill is gained when we realize that for every single thing that happens in our lives we get to choose whether it's good or bad, whether it will weaken or strengthen us. ✨

# Raising Compassionate Kids

How to raise kids who are kind and considerate is a hot topic these days. With so much bullying happening in the world, both in schools and via the Internet, it seems more important than ever to raise kids who can be thoughtful and empathetic towards other people.

Children have an inborn capacity for compassion. Although you can take steps to raise a compassionate child who is kind to others yet strong enough to stand up to hurtful words and actions when necessary, the most important thing to remember is that children may listen to what we say, but they model themselves on how we behave. This means that if you practice and demonstrate compassion (with yourself, your child and the other people in your world), your child is very likely to emulate that behavior.

Here are some ideas to help you integrate compassion into your everyday life in ways that you can share with your child:



**Volunteer.** Show your child that all people deserve kindness by serving together at a soup kitchen or volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. Let your child choose a volunteer activity that builds on interests they already have (for instance, the Humane Society if they love animals or reading aloud to the blind if they love to read).

**Get a pet or a small plot of dirt to cultivate.** When a child is invested in the care of another living thing, they learn about nurturing themselves and others and are less likely to engage in bullying. And most pets and plants require time outdoors, so you'll both get a good dose of fresh air!

**Practice listening.** Darcia Narvaez, a writer for *Psychology Today*, says: "... if you are treated with empathy, you will treat others the same way." When your child is hurting, instead of responses like "keep your chin up" or "boys don't cry," invite your child to share his or her feelings. Particularly

with younger children, hug them to provide soothing reassurance that it's okay to experience and express feelings of distress. When they feel loved and fully heard, it will be easier for them to listen to others with an open and compassionate heart.

**Limit time with violent video games and television shows.** Numerous studies have shown that media violence promotes aggression and desensitizes kids to the consequences of violent behavior.

**Travel to a foreign country or a neighborhood very different from your own.** Traveling to a place where people have a different culture, language, and music shows a child that differences can be both interesting and fun!

Activities that promote compassion mean you'll be bonding with your child in ways you can both feel good about. In addition, activities like volunteering or growing a garden serve another purpose—they remind both of you that you have something valuable to offer the world. Your child's growing self-respect can help turn the tide of bullying and the devastating effect that this has on children's lives. \*

For more information on her services, please feel free to call: 713-562-7819.

Margaret is a Licensed Professional Counselor and psychotherapist. Margaret provides couple, individual and group therapy. In addition to working with adolescents and young adults, Margaret has a special interest in marriages, families and women's issues. Margaret has two offices conveniently located at: 1960 & SH 249 (NW Houston) and in Bellaire (Galleria Area).

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