

CALMNESS

Find the Calm in the Storm
& Enjoy Life Now

Stress Free Life



HELGA DESOUSA

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my late father, José Inacio DeSousa. It was his presence in my life that taught me to always find a solution to any problem, to never give up, and to never forget my human heart during the process. You are one of my greatest teachers, one of my greatest gifts, and one of my greatest memories.

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Introduction

*H*ave you ever wanted something so badly that you would do anything to have it? You would even sacrifice everything to keep it in your life? For three decades, I have tried to obtain my parents' approval, be thin, and find the perfect man to settle down with.

The more I tried to achieve these goals, the more they ran away from me. I could never be perfect in anyone else's eyes. But really, I was never perfect in my own eyes, either. I was a desperate human being who had little faith in positive outcomes. I worried and expected the worst. And that is exactly what I got: The Worst.

One day, I decided to make a drastic change. It involved taking a risk with no decided outcome. I quit my stable job, sold my condo, and moved to Japan to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) for two years. It was there that I learned about calmness.

During the first few months of my stay, I was a foreigner who had little language skills and little support. Oddly enough, I came to a point where I noticed that all the things that I used to worry about did not seem to be as big or urgent anymore. I also learned that there was no difference in any outcome whether I brought stress to the table or remained calm. I chose to take the calm route because I found that I was a happier person enjoying my moments in Japan.

While I was practicing remaining calm, I found myself coaching other people who were experiencing some form of distress in their lives. I had a friend whom I would meet once a week for language exchange that morphed into counselling. He had experienced a huge disappointment in maintaining

a business in Indonesia. He came back to Japan defeated. He jumped into teaching Japanese and English, but he found that it was not his passion.

Through our sessions, he learned to stay focused on what was important and used meditation and his spirituality as his calming practice. He eventually was offered a prominent position to do business in Indonesia. The offer came without any effort on his part. He is happily married to his then-girlfriend and they have a beautiful baby girl.

I returned to Canada carrying what I had learned from my time in Japan. I went to teacher's college and began teaching at the high school level. My first couple of years teaching teenagers were definitely challenging, but with the challenging kids, I learned to become a better teacher. I even became a more tolerant and calm person. I have been blessed with these opportunities that just pushed me to be better.

When I first thought about writing this book on calmness, these three words came to mind: find

the calm. We already know what it takes to remain calm. We already know what it takes to eat healthy and exercise for optimum health. We live in the information age, in which we have access to expert knowledge. The challenge is putting all that good knowledge into practice.

A coach of mine used to tell me this when training for my first “try” triathlon: “*Perfect practice makes perfect.*” It is not only applying the knowledge, but also applying the skill as accurately as possible to bring about perfect results.

When I started this book, I based it on the premise that stress can be reduced by simply changing one’s perception of their situation. With thanks to the urging of my publisher, I interviewed over 50 practitioners in the wellness field. All of these practitioners helped their clients achieve balance in their lives.

As I interviewed these practitioners, the book evolved into a more encompassing approach that

does not only involve one’s mind, but also involves one’s physical health. You will learn in this book about stories and insights from these practitioners.

In addition, I have also designed a four-step system that will help you to remain calm in any stressful situation. By facing the challenge early on, it becomes much less intimidating and more manageable to deal with. The remainder of the book includes reminders that one must attend to the realms of mind, body, and spirit in order to lead a calm and peaceful lifestyle.

It is an honour for me to take this journey on with you. May this book be your go-to manual when situations get stormy. May you tap into that inner resource that you already have within you: your higher and calming self.

Helga DeSousa

Brampton, Ontario

January 26, 2014



*“When you learn
to stay calm,
you become
in control of
any stressful
moment.”*



CHAPTER ONE

Storms of Life

Most of the world's worst natural disasters came without warning (DW Network, 2012) They whip through, changing the landscape, uprooting trees, displacing People, and ultimately, ending lives.

Similarly, the “storms of life” also arrive unexpectedly; they displace us from our way of life, as we know it, and terminate the way we have been

living. One constant that natural disasters and the storms of life share is that they never stay. They become part of the past. Most weather storms end in minutes.

Life storms have the same duration. What usually happens is that we tend to recreate the life storm event over and over in our minds. We start to feel the effects of the playback physically, emotionally, and mentally. This is our modern-day stress response.

The tsunami of 2004, known as the Sumatra–Andaman earthquake, was the third largest earthquake to occur in the world’s history of natural disasters. The tsunami arrived without warning. The combined death toll of all countries that were affected swelled to 230,000 people, 9,000 of whom were foreign tourists who returned home without their loved ones.

Daily Mail Reporter, 2012

Some potential victims of the storm recognized the natural warning signs and immediately took to higher ground. A hunter-gatherer community, called the Onge, which lived on the Andaman islands, were near the epicentre of the tsunami. They saw signs that they remembered from their folklore and moved inland. As a result, the whole community survived.

A 10-year-old British girl by the name of Tilly Smith, based on what she had learned in school about the waves, knew that the tsunami was approaching. She was able to warn people who were at the beach and managed to save 100 people. The majority of the animals in Sri Lanka, Sumatra, and Thailand moved to higher ground hours before the tsunami took place.

**The Monterey Institute for Technology
and Education, 2013**

Those who were saved had knowledge of and understood the warning signs. As a parallel to

our stress response, with knowledge, we, too, can identify the warning signs that a storm is occurring within us and use that awareness to calm ourselves. Those who were swept away in the tsunami and lost their lives were unaware of the storm. They were not in tune with their natural environment, just as many of us are not in tune with our bodies or our own selves.

The world's response to the disaster was a demonstration of the power of the world community, as it banded together to help those who were plagued by the disaster. The intent of using the 2004 tsunami here is not to diminish it, but to show how a huge disastrous event can give us perspective on our lives. Healing and rebuilding requires the help and support of others.

The hardest hit areas, Indonesia's Aceh in Northern Sumatra, has undergone successful reconstruction and rebuilding of its communities.

In 2009, The Guardian, from the UK, released an article about the reconstruction of these regions later:

Since 2004 it [The Red Cross] has provided 4,807,000 people with assistance; 51,395 new houses have been built; 289 hospitals and clinics built or rehabilitated. Pledged international aid from all sources for the recovery has topped \$13.5bn, almost half of it given by private individuals and organisations.

That sum stands as a powerful measure of the scale of a disaster that unfolded half a decade ago – whose physical reminders have all but been erased in the reconstruction effort but whose reality has not been wiped from a generation's collective memory.

Peter Beaumont, 2009

As these authors indicate, the reconstruction succeeded in wiping out the physical evidence;

however, the collective memory of a generation can never be erased. The survivors have no recourse, but to carry on with their lives and honour those who have died. Some of the survivors summed up the aftermath:

The Peatfields [who lost their 5-year-old daughter in Sri Lanka] bravely cope by raising money for children in Sri Lanka. 'We do it for Isabella.'

Survivors like Will Robbins ask themselves every day why they were saved when so many died. I strive, for their sake, to be better than I might otherwise have been.'

For as Stu Breisch so poignantly says and this documentary so powerfully shows, the tsunami teaches us 'how fragile our lives really are. They can be snuffed out in an instant.'

Rennell, 2009

Despite the great disaster and the trauma that unfolded, most survivors conceded the fact that they had to live their lives. They will never have the answers for why they were spared and they will always be reminded that life, indeed, is precious. In honour of their daughter's memory, the Peatfields set up a fund to aid children who were victims of the tsunami in Sri Lanka.

To date, 39 tsunami warning stations have been set up in the Indian Ocean for future occurrences. The Indonesian government has become very effective with disaster relief, in that they have become the model for reconstruction for other nations who have recently experienced tsunamis and earthquakes.

From a great natural disaster, we again can take some of the lessons learned and even apply them to surviving our own personal storms. Bill O'Leary, a tsunami survivor, has "seven great life lessons":

1. *If you live in the front row, this is where tsunamis hit.*
Oceanfront homes come with drawbacks. Have an exit plan, in case of emergency, and learn the warning signs.
2. *A tsunami does not come unannounced.*
There are ALWAYS warning signs. Keep your feelings alert and you should not miss them. If there is a sudden change, seek an explanation.
3. *If you know about a problem, alert others.*
Don't be afraid to be a Chicken Little. The sky may really be falling.
4. *When you smell danger, it is wise to run away.*
When your gut feeling alerts you, don't freeze. Do something. The problem will only get worse if you wait. If you don't know what could be coming, ask others for help. If there is nobody around to help, simply run. Trust your gut feeling. If you feel unsafe, immediately remove yourself from the situation. Stop a date and excuse yourself. It's better to be silly than dead.

5. *If you cannot run away from the danger, face it with courage.*
Jump on the wave and keep your boat straight. Be totally fearless. Fight if you have to.
6. *No matter what happens, keep your cool.*
There is no sense in panicking. Don't let your fears or anger overwhelm you. In any situation, the first question you should ask yourself is, "What can I do about it?" Decide on the best course of action and carry on.
7. *You are priceless.*

Your life is thousands of times more valuable than anything you own. If you smell danger, forget about your purse, cash or family memorabilia. Even if you have nothing, you will be still the same person you are today.

Welton, 2013

The first five points are practical tips in physically surviving a tsunami. In the remaining lessons, O’Leary calls for courage, calmness, and a shift in perspective when dealing with a tsunami. He ends with an emphasis on the “fragility of life.”

Most of us are too stressed and too consumed with our own life storms and we simply do not see what is “fragile” in our own lives. It could be our physical, mental, or emotional health; or even our relationships with others.

The tsunami of 2004 can be used as a metaphor for the havoc that we create when responding to something like being stuck in a traffic jam or surviving a divorce or having to cope with the death of a loved one. Of course, you may say that what happened with the tsunami is not comparable, since the disaster had such a high magnitude that it destroyed and displaced many people’s lives in 13 countries. It is simply too big to use as an example for dealing with stress.

The tsunami was the shifting of seismic plates underneath the floor of the Indian Ocean. For whatever reason, the earth was changing. Change in anyone’s life can mean shaking up an old routine or an old way of thinking, or it could mean death, literally or metaphorically speaking. It takes no prisoners. Despite how mighty change may be, we still get to choose how we respond to it.

Growing up, I was plagued by many life storms. The first tenet I declared to myself was that I didn’t belong anywhere because I was not worth it. My parents were immigrants whose main goal was to pay off the two mortgages on our house. My mother, though she did her best, was not a nurturing parent. My father was the one who would teach me something in a positive manner, though he was rarely around and was always working.

I was the middle child of three girls. I had a weight problem, so my mother thought it was wise to not let me have any sweets, even though she tried to coax my very-skinny sister to eat sweets that were for her,

only. That did not help with my self-esteem. On top of that, we wore hand-me-down clothes from my cousins that were out-dated.

I was not a popular kid at school and had no friends. In fifth grade, my old tenet came to life: I did not belong anywhere. I really don't know what happened or why I attracted the attention. Suddenly, other kids started teasing me. They became verbally abusive, calling me fat. They told me to buy gum for them, or else.

So I had my mother buy gum from the grocery store, which was a little extra for her to do. I returned to school with the gum, hoping to win their friendship. They tried to make me give away all of my pieces of gum, so that I would be left with nothing. Then one of the boy bullies threatened to beat me up after school.

Every day, I would be taunted for something. I didn't say anything to the teacher or to my parents.

The bullies simply confirmed what I was already feeling about myself.

One day during class, one of the girls got out of her seat and hit me on my back. It finally dawned on me to raise my hand to get the teacher's attention. The bullies pleaded with me to not tell the teacher, but I did. The teacher pulled us all outside and talk to us. She said she had noticed that this was going on and was waiting for me to come forward. The taunting died down a bit, with an occasional threat here and there. Then came an opportunity for me.

There was a school-wide poetry reading competition. Poetry was what I loved most. I memorized and practiced and practiced. The bullies came to me and said that I better win or else.

The thing was, it didn't matter to me if I won or not. I was doing something that I really loved and I had fun doing it. I memorized and performed my reading in front of the whole school in the gym. I had no idea if I had won or not. I was stressed about

it because of the threats from my bullies. I remember hearing the announcements of the winners. My name came on the PA system as winning first place for the junior division of the poetry speaking contest.

The bullies left me alone and the whole school congratulated me. I was still friendless for my remaining years in elementary school and I got used to just living with my own company. I think that is why years later, I never had any qualms eating alone in restaurants or going to movies by myself. I learned to enjoy being by myself.

The bullying had continued because of my own belief that I did not belong anywhere and worse yet, that I was not worth it. I remember not wanting to go to my fifth grade class and having the attitude that this was the norm for me.

I listened to the bullies and believed that what they said about me was true because they confirmed what I had already thought of myself. I could have stopped it all much earlier if I had gone to my

teacher sooner. She could have moved me or kept a more-watchful eye.

I accepted that life would always be crappy for me because I was an unworthy person. This monster of an idea did not disappear entirely, even after elementary school. I still carried this very low self-esteem with me into high school, into my twenties, and for another 15 years of my life. I did not live a life of calmness then, simply because I let circumstances come crashing down on me and take me away. I did not feel worth saving, but I managed to stay alive.

Seven years ago, I made the decision to change my life's direction. I changed my old tenet from not belonging anywhere because I was unworthy to my belonging to a much bigger world because I was needed. When I mastered the monster of anxiety and self-doubt, I mastered calmness.

Storms are challenges that will come unexpectedly. Storms are what they are: storms. There is nothing complex about them, other than that they drive drastic

change. Sometimes, though, it takes a catastrophe to bring out the strength that has already been buried deep inside. We get to choose how we respond to any life stressor. Once we make the choice that empowers us, the initial fear that kept us stuck in first place becomes small and less menacing.

As the external world moves and changes, it also strives for balance, which could be construed as calmness. Some may label severe weather storms as the earth's response to global warming. The earth, in turn, is adjusting itself to establish a new equilibrium. Even our bodies work hard to meet that balance. The biology of this balance will be discussed in the next chapter.



C H A P T E R T W O



The Biology of Stress

The body already naturally strives for calmness. The scientific term for the body's goal for calmness is homeostasis, which is the body's way of maintaining balance internally by triggering systematic actions in response to any stimulus that may upset the body's own internal harmony.

A blatant example of the body striving to maintain balance is when the body fights a virus by raising its temperature and slowing the body down to fight the invaders. As human beings, we have evolved to a point where we do not only use our physical body to survive, but we also rely on our own reasoning and decision making that sometimes enhances the body's cause or undermines it.

Our perception of the stress trigger, which could be workload or being stuck in a traffic jam, signals the body to move into emergency mode. The biological stress response is the body's natural system of maintaining a balance by inducing a "fight or flight" reaction, which, if carried for a prolonged period, could lead to mental and emotional instability, as well as chronic disease in the long run.

The good news is that we have a brain that can alter our body's systematic reaction to perceived danger by simply changing its outlook of the challenge put forward. All of the side effects of the body in emergency mode can be prevented and

ultimately reversed in most cases. It all comes down to choosing one's own perception and answering the challenge.

The body has a built-in mechanism with which to handle any upset through the "fight or flight" response, which is wired into every animal on the planet.

**CMHC UT Counseling and
Mental Health Center, 2014**

As mentioned before, the main advantage that humans have over other organisms is the ability to rationalize and decide the action to take in response to a stimulus before the survival instinct takes over completely. Despite our reasoning capabilities, the body is still not something to be overlooked, since it has an amazing way of working behind the scenes to ensure our survival.

The body uses a coordinated effort between different organs to steer the body into heightened

action. This co-ordination is known as the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA). The axis involves hormone release interactions, which regulate many functions in the body, such as temperature, digestion, mood, sexuality, the immune system, and energy use.

The hypothalamus (part of the brain) is engaged by an outside stressor by the individual. It releases two hormones called vasopressin and corticotrophin-releasing hormone (CRH), which are transported into the pituitary gland (also part of the brain) to produce adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH).

ACTH gets into the bloodstream and makes its way into the adrenal glands, which sit on top of the kidneys. The adrenal glands then produce a hormone called cortisol, which is a steroid hormone that causes the flight or fight response. Its main functions are to increase blood sugar, fat metabolism, and carbohydrates for ready energy, while suppressing

the immune system and bone formation to conserve it. In a short burst, cortisol has its benefits to allow individuals to take up challenges and adapt to new situations.

However, if this hyperactivity persists for a long period of time, the body eventually will deplete its much-needed resources and start to show warning signs that many people do not take notice until their physical situation becomes more visible to them.

The presence of cortisol for a longer of period time causes an imbalance in the body to the degree that it shows up as insomnia, gastrointestinal (GI) tract issues, and high blood pressure, as well as infertility in the majority of cases.

Many practitioners and doctors can confirm the fact that 75% - 90% of their patients who suffer from the effects of living with stress. (Moods Disorder Society of Canada/La Société Pour Les Troubles d`Humeur du, 2009) Kim Boersen-Gladman, a registered massage therapist (RMT) and clinic

director of Head to Foot Oasis Wellness Centre in Burlington, Ontario, can attest to the imbalances created by high levels of cortisol in the body:

When your body is under stress, it produces a chemical called cortisol, which is acidic. Disease tends to grow well in an acidic environment. To keep your body healthy, we want to have it in a more alkaline (basic) state.

Boersen-Gladman RMT, 2013

Boersen–Gladman indicates that cortisol being present in the body creates an acidic environment and advises that optimal health is when we are in a more alkaline (basic) state. Boersen –Gladman also mentions that most clients comment that they feel the stress in their neck and shoulders. There is a tightness in the muscles and shallow breathing, which decreases the amount of oxygen entering the tissues. The clenching of the jaw, neck, and shoulders is indicative of the individual not coping well in their elevated stress response state.

Ruchi Shetty, a naturopath with Yorkville Naturopathic in Toronto, makes an interesting observation on the impact of stress on the immune system:

A cold is the body's response to a virus. When we are stressed out, we don't necessarily get sick. Instead, we harbor the virus and we can't fight it off because our immune system is being suppressed.

Shetty ND, 2013

The body does not address the virus, since it is responding to the perceived anxiety of schooling. When the source of that tension is lifted, the body goes back to its normal day-to-day functioning of fighting something like a cold. There is a connection here on the impact of stress on physical health, especially when the immune system is being curbed for the sake of a phantom greater cause.

Jasmine Sufi, an acupuncturist and cofounder of Acutoronto in the Yonge-Davisville area, also witnesses the impact of stress on her fertility clients.

Sufi claims that stress is a culprit and speaks to the acupuncture approach to redirecting the body's resources to achieve the much-wanted balance that will allow fertility.

The stress response - the physical response, according to Chinese Medicine - is the constriction of blood flow. The acupuncture counteracts the body's physical response to choose (remove) stress by releasing tension, improving circulation, and allowing the individual to feel calmer.

Sufi, 2013

Just as the immune system is suppressed, the blood flow to other organs that are not deemed as essential to survival is also decreased. The moment that the blood flow is redirected, tension is released

and the individual is calmer, so they are more likely to conceive and carry their pregnancy to full term.

Clearly, Sufi shows how the imbalance created by cortisol can be reversed once action is taken to strategize a way to release the tension buildup, whether that be through acupuncture, massage therapy, or even taking a true time out. Strategies to achieve this release of tension or even practicing not to create tension will be illustrated in the following chapters.

One sure strategy for prevention is noticing the first small tell-tale signs of stress in the body. From my interviews, the one common thread that most of the practitioners have professed is that their clients are usually not aware that they are experiencing stress.

Stress will show up in the guise of many illnesses and other physiological discomforts that simply are signalling that the body is pushing beyond its brink. Boersen-Gladman describes how stress shows up in her clients:

By having constant muscle tightness and clenching it can trigger [a stress] response. If you're stressed, you are not taking time to eat. Your body goes into response mode. If you are not going to shut down, your body will do it for you.

Boersen-Gladman RMT, 2013

A quote that Boersen-Gladman had on her business card sums this up with, “If you listen to your body whisper, you’ll never have to hear it scream.”

Boersen-Gladman indicates that something like a migraine, which would not appear to be a sign to her client, is indeed a symptom of the body’s stress response. Her practice in massage therapy helps to restore muscle balance by releasing the acidity trapped in the muscle tissue.

Boersen – Gladman also points out the responsibility of the individual to take care of their body (in this case,

nourishment) and to watch for those small signs that the body is experiencing some level of distress.

Being aware of these signs can save a person from future chronic ailments, which could result in anxiety, physical problems, or even an emotional explosion with a friend or spouse.

The body’s stress response is a natural mechanism that is triggered by a stimulus that may upset its internal balance or calmness.

There are tools in place for the body to achieve homeostasis and when it is faced with a perceived danger, it taps into the HPA axis to quickly adapt to the challenge, whether through fight or flight.

The physical realm (the body) expresses what a person is experiencing mentally and emotionally. It is simply responding to the feedback it receives from the mind. Since the element of choice is always present for every human being, each person can choose to be calm and for their body to be stress-free.



C H A P T E R T H R E E

Stress at Work and at Home

*J*commuted for six years to downtown Toronto by the GO Train. Although the ride itself could beat the traffic jams moving in and out of the city, we rushed in and out of the train station like we were deer running from a forest fire. There was not a moment to pause or take in the scenery, since there was a risk of being trampled by the moving crowd.

This is the pace that most of us run at when we need to get to work, do work tasks, pick things up for home, and race to get home. Then when we get home, we either bring work home with us or we have other family tasks that need to be performed in order to keep house and family together. Stressful living seems to be the cultural norm.

We are told that if we want to be successful that we must live a hectic lifestyle. If we are not over performing at the workplace then we will not be viewed as valuable employees. If we are not enrolling our children in extra-curricular activities, then we are not good parents. If we do not do all the home tasks as timely and effectively as our work tasks, then surely we are not living our full potential.

We are just not trying hard enough. This is not to say that we should live our lives with zero challenges. We need challenges to push us and shape us towards our goals. Our culture celebrates this concept of needing to strive at a strenuous pace in order to be successful. As in an old saying: *“Rest*

is for with the Wicked.” If we are not racing to the finish line, then simply we are not living.

The Yerke-Dodson Law (1908) on stress performance actually disapproves this cherished culture belief. Robert M. Yerke and John Dillingham Dodson were psychologists who have done research on stress and performance.

Their findings in their research revealed that low to moderate levels of stress help people change and adapt to meet challenges; however moderate to high levels of stress have an inverse relationship to performance.

Quality of performance goes down as more and more stress is applied.

Kahlia, 2002

The law suggests that a small dose of stress has positive effects, but when taken to the extreme,

performance is not the only thing that is affected in this relationship.

Inarguably, stressful and frantic living has been proven to not only to be non-productive, but to have unhealthy consequences. Fast paced living has also been costing our health. If we look it all in retrospect, we find that health is our true currency. When we lose it, we pay a high price for it.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Health Survey, stress related mental illnesses will rank second to heart disease by the year 2020.

Kahlia, 2002

Stress related illnesses are such the norm in our society that even the Harrison medical book indicates that “50-80% of all physical disorders have psychosomatic or stress related origins.” (al., 2008)

There is an obvious impact on physical health which is discussed in the previous chapter.

The WHO Global Health survey shows that because stressful living is an acceptable way of life for most people, it will no doubt bring a rise in the number of stress related mental illnesses which take on in the form of anxiety and depression.

In the Globe and Mail series on stress, it is reported that work absenteeism due to stress has risen to 20% in the past decade which has resulted in \$10 billion a year for employees.

The financial burden on the Canadian Health Care system came under the figure of \$14 billion dollars. The impact has been \$42 billion dollars in the United States in health care to treat stress induced illnesses.

Agrell, 2010

On a larger scale, the fast paced rat race lifestyle is detrimental to most of us from a national standpoint and even onto a global scale.

Despite the gloomy figures on the impact of stress on our society, we still have the ability to choose to stay caught under the undertow of fear and anxiety or to meet our challenge with calming rationale.

Even though we may feel the initial physical response to a stressful event, we still can decide how we will approach the challenge: with fear or with calmness. Dr. Fateh Srajeldin, who is a world renowned naturopath, tells us the importance of modelling calmness in a family situation:

How stressful events were handled by the parents will affect the child's perception of the way to deal with things and will influence how future stressful events will be handled by that individual in the future. Witnessing parents in heated arguments develops and instills fear, stress and anxiety in children.

Srajeldin ND, 2013

Dr. Srajeldin suggests that when a child sees how parents react to stressful events, they will pick the same tendencies. He implores parents to be cognoscente of their children when heated arguments erupt. He emphasizes that stress definitely leads to disease.

A child will lead a healthier life as an adult if the child learns how to approach challenges in a more collected manner.

Dr. Srajeldin's comment also indicates that environment does play a part to a child's stress response in adulthood. On the same note of environment, Angelo Correiro, who is a psychotherapist and energy healer in Stouffville, Ontario, attests to the toxicity that we as a society have produced in our environment:

Calm is our natural state of being. The optimal approach to maintaining health and well-being is to allow the body, to do what it does very well already. If you begin to observe yourself wherever you are, you will begin to find examples of where you are calm and where you are not.

Corriero, 2013

Correiro describes how we are virtually unaware of our toxic environment. We are constantly bombarded with so much stimuli. We end up running on the hamster wheel without being aware as to why we are running at all.

He further points out that we in fact already know how to be calm and there have been examples of where we have exercised calmness in our lives. It is a matter of “allowing ourselves” access to that calmness for every stressful scenario that we face. In short, we have the power to choose to be calm despite the environment that we live in.

Most of us choose to live with stress because we have lost our focus on what matters to us when feeling overwhelmed. Laurie Huston of Intuitive Soul shared an interesting view as to why most of us continue on the stress path despite how we may feel:

In the book, “Conversations with the Children of Now” by Meg Blackburn Losey, a thirteen year old girl is asked what our purposes are. She answers that we have a major purpose to make a difference and a minor purpose to have fun. Most people are in a job where they feel that they are not making a difference; while other people are making a difference, but are not having fun.

Huston, 2013

Huston suggests that we are going against “our natural flow”. This is due to the bombardment of stimuli which is in essence disrupting our own natural rhythm. When we go against this flow or rhythm, we

suffer the ramifications of a stressful existence. When we lose focus about what we are about, we become vulnerable and feel overwhelmed by our stressful circumstances.

As I have stated before, we all can identify moments where we handled situations calmly. Evidently, we do have the capability to bring in calmness into any situation. Take this time now to list at least two instances where you acted calmly in a stressful situation. Answer the following questions to each instance:

- 
1. *What was the stressful situation?*
 2. *How did you resolve it calmly?*
 3. *Why did you think you responded with calmness?*
 4. *What was the result?*
 5. *What did you think about yourself when you took this route?*
- 

Notice the scenarios where you took decisive action to be calm despite the circumstance. The choice made to be calm in these instances were more likely to have more satisfactory outcomes than the ones where you had chosen the path to panic, or to switch to angry action.

As stated before, you do know how to be calm. Would you like to apply that decisive calmness into every situation? We all do. In fact, just as our bodies look to maintain balance for our health, we also look to have calmness in our lives.

The irony is that as modern consumers, we have been taught through the media and advertisements that happiness resides outside of ourselves. Meanwhile, all that balance, joy, and serenity that we crave for, is really within us and within our power.

When I worked in the corporate sector, I was living my life according to what others saw was appropriate and what our culture called me to do in order to achieve success through stressful living.

During my nine years, I sat at my cubicle knowing that I could do more with my life. The work stress, I had to accept as my reality. I noticed that a lot of people identify their self-worth with their jobs. Tasks and shorten deadlines hung over them like a death sentence.

I had a customer who was frantic about our installations, our delivery dates, and she even had to be online with our technician to ensure that they brought up the data circuit without any problems.

I was placed on the project because she was a person that needed to be informed what was happening every step of the way and was always worried that an installation would go wrong. She needed extra calls, extra emails and extra assurances.

She basically pegged her value according to each successful installation. When an installation did not go smoothly, her world would fall apart.

She lived in constant worry and no doubt made herself vulnerable to situations that were not within her realm of control. She was not the technician who was doing the install, nor the person activating the circuit.

She had an absolute distrust that things would not work without her frantic outbursts. Our working relationship lasted to the final installation and she was grateful that I was there for her to ensure that her installations were being taken care of.

Despite my efforts to ease her mind, she still held the belief that each installation would go wrong without her intervention. She chose to tie herself to this worry. Does this sound familiar?

When I was a little girl, I believed that if I didn't pray my rosary and didn't pay this debt that I owed to God for preventing something bad from happening, my worst fears would come alive. This is no way to live. She was putting unnecessary pressure on herself just like I was paranoid with upsetting God for not delivering.

This is no way to live. We are not meant to live our lives out in a bomb shelter. Yet, we witness this behavior every day. Whether that be on the stock market floor or people trampling over each other to get a deal on Black Friday. At the end of the day, we still get to choose to race to dodge change or be still to face it.

For nine years, I constantly helped to either prevent or put out fires. I have been on calls with cutovers that would occur after midnight and gave my all to ensure that the world worked smoothly. I would pray that everything would go smoothly on each cutover.

Then one day, during the job cut period, I had witnessed an ugly scene while I was on my coffee break. I saw a manager, whom I worked with, being escorted out of the building. She was crying and the two HR people were standing there with her while she hailed a cab.

According to policy, when you got notice from HR that your job was terminated, you are not allowed to go back to collect your things. This manager served the company for over 20 years and there she was left on the curb like some empty pop can that just been tossed to the ground.

I felt it was the coldest thing for the company to do to a person after so many years of blood, sweat, and tears. That was my decisive moment that I would no longer be part of the company.

I decided that I can no longer stay. I knew that I can use my time and talents to contribute to others in a more humane way. My focus shifted and as a result, an opportunity came to me in matter of months while riding the Go Train.

I quit my stable job and decent income to teach ESL in Japan. It was the best decision of my life. I made a calming choice in the face of an unpleasant experience which was not done out of fear or out of worry. I just did not know it at the time.

Take a moment and list your three top life stressors in your life and state how you feel about them:



For example: The top three stressors of my life

1. *Feeling overwhelmed at work. Can't say no. Feel powerless.*
2. *Have a demanding elderly mother. Feel guilty.*
3. *Can't keep a healthy weight. Feel disgusted with myself.*

Now it is your turn:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



Look carefully at these factors and the emotions that are tied to it.

In the above provided, notice that these stressors are external factors: workload, a demanding elderly parent, and weight control.

These are things are still within the realm of our perception. Workload can be overwhelming, but when broken down and prioritized, it becomes a less daunting monster.

An elderly parent can be demanding and will always be demanding. It is still up to us to decide which demands are urgent and to set those boundaries. It is not a question of being a bad child, but about letting them know and respect that you also have your life to live.

Lastly, weight control is also choice. You can make healthy choices to eat. You also can make room to be active. It can be something simple as going for a walk after hours of sitting at your desk.

These may appear to be simple solutions to what appears to be big problems. If we can get over the emotional attachment to these challenges, we can always find them manageable or better yet, doable.

Stress at work and at home can result from many factors. Our response to it was likely modelled to us in childhood and as a result, we lose focus to what is meaningful to us. The good news is that although these appear to be powerful agents, they are easily diminished as you will discover in these next upcoming chapters.



C H A P T E R F O U R



Calmness Tip 1

Quiet the Storm

As highlighted in the first chapter, we know that storms (otherwise known as stressors) will hit us unexpectedly. Despite how ugly the storm may appear to us, there are strategies to diminish its strength and size. Just as we are wired for fight or flight, we

are also built to tap into our calming centres that reside in the body, mind, and soul.

So the question to ask is when a storm arrives unannounced on your doorstep, how do you avoid getting into panic mode? Your first line of a defence is to give attention to your breathing and adjust its rhythm to a calming pace. Breathing is the body's natural calmer.

When we panic, the first thing that goes erratic is our breathing. We try to take in as much air as possible at a chaotic pace which is not sustainable, nor effective in responding to the storm.

You will notice that when you do something as simple as taking a couple of breaths, you shift your focus from the storm to your breath and by doing so, you tap into the body's calming network of nerves termed as the parasympathetic nervous system.

In meditation and in yoga teachings, there is a focus on paying attention to one's breathing as a way to tune in to the body and putting the outside world on hold for the moment.

This knowledge is not new. If you observe paramedics and rescuers live or from a source, one of the main things they will instruct the rescued people is to slow down their breathing in order to calm themselves. Even though slowing down your breathing to relax is common knowledge, it is not practiced often enough to keep those cortisol levels low and our rational thinking high.

On one of my Thanksgiving holidays, my friends and I rented a cottage in the Blue Mountain area. My partner and I decided it would be a good idea to bring up our road bikes since we have not ridden for a whole season. I just got into cycling two seasons before and learned how to use clip less pedals which was a monumental thing for me, but I got the hang of it. I was still not comfortable with gear switching and riding up steep hills.

We went for a ride and managed to tackle some small rolling hills which were not difficult for me. Then, there it was, Mt. Everest. The hill looked like it was ninety-degrees. I thought to myself, no way! There was no other way, so I had to tackle it. I switched the appropriate gear and up I went.

As I went up, my breathing was becoming out of whack. I was almost hyperventilating. At the same time, there was a voice screaming in my head. It was telling me to stop and that I can't make the hill. I was going to fall if I was going to continue. I am not going to make it. The funny thing is that I just took notice of the voice as if it was someone else screaming at me. I knew that I had to make the hill.

Despite its powerful demands, I did not stop. The first thing I did was to move my attention to my breathing. I slowed it down to manageable deeper breaths and told myself that we were almost there anyways, so why quit now? After much effort

physically as opposed to mentally, I made it to the top of the hill.

After conquering this one big hill, the others that followed were pale by comparison because I was able to acknowledge the panicked voice as not me and in turn took control of my breathing.

Changing my breathing signalled my body to be calm and to focus on the task of going uphill. I was telling my body and subsequently my mind that I was not in danger. These are the two key components to quieting the onset of a storm.

Marc Levine practices cranial-sacral therapy, which is a branch of osteopathy that helps with the flow of the cerebrospinal fluid as it moves from the cranium to other parts of the central nervous system. Levine describes the practice of redirecting our senses which can be helpful in any life storm:

When attention is directed to sensations rather than either narratives in one's own head or reaction to a rapidly changing environment, a re-calibration of sensitivity happens. This allows for us to become aware of emotions that haven't had enough time to be processed.

Levine, 2013

Levine reveals that through cranial sacral therapy, his clients are able to create a safe space for themselves and a moment where they can “recalibrate” their senses. When this occurs, we become clearer with whatever situation is at hand and we no longer associate ourselves with those screaming voices in our head. We are able to assess our emotions with clear and calming indifference. The Mt. Everest becomes just another rolling hill. We can change our state readily when we choose to.

Two things had occurred when I was tackling the big hill: I changed my breathing and I changed

my mind set. The latter is an example of changing one's senses.

Notably, the voice of “I can't” was quite strong and I could have just easily stopped my bike to walk uphill. However, there was never any physical danger. It was all in my head that the trek was too difficult for me to tackle. I was basically hearing my fear loud and clear: the fear of failure.

The state change occurred when I recognized the screaming voice was just my voice of safety. It was simply over-reacting to the physical challenge of going uphill. It held the belief that I would fall off my bike clipped in and injure myself. That voice stemmed from my perceived notion that I am not skilled, nor physically fit enough to tackle the hill.

I had a nasty fall a few years ago with my bike that affected my chest muscles and it hurt every time I breathed. Eventually it went away and I was shy riding. That fall stayed in my brain's memory

bank and became a knee jerk reaction when I did not feel comfortable riding.

The moment that I controlled my breathing and countered the voice with a positive thought as I was tackling that hill, the voice quieted. I told it with “I am almost over the hill” therefore, there was no reason to stop now.

After conquering the hill, I was euphoric and the voice became quiet for the remainder of our ride. A lot of the literature for personal growth and cognitive therapy describes that our perception of reality can create havoc in our lives.

These perceptions are created from a subjective take on our experiences. We then label them as “real”. If we can change our perception of the stressor and make it a less threatening storm, then we are able to approach the challenge with a steady and rational approach. We are more likely to succeed with a challenge when we can move towards it with calm confidence.

Another common thread that creates our stress monsters is that we are not enough. Whatever the status quo is, it is simply not good enough if it does not match what society upholds as beauty, success, and high social status. You are not thin enough, tall enough, wealthy enough, etc.

I have struggled with this for years when it came to my weight. That struggle alone permeated through other areas of my life such as my financial well-being. I would either overspend to live up to an image or to simply feel better about myself with some instant material gratification.

I spoke to a wonderful financial planner, Shannon Lee Simmons, who has a financial practice and a syndicated video series called Money Awesomeness. She brought an interesting view about the onslaught of social media and how it has set “the benchmark” for upscale living.

As a result, many of us try to live up to this standard and create financial havoc for ourselves.

She indicated to me that the road to financial well-being is truly changing one's perspective and realizing that someone else may not be as rich as you think.

We need to stop comparing ourselves to others and look at what is “really” important to us as opposed to “keeping up with Joneses”. Simmons' message is as follows:

Finding out what makes you truly happy is imperative to financial success. We only have so many resources, so make sure that you're spending your money on things that you truly value and not what will make a good Instagram photo.

Simmons, 2014

As we all are aware, financial worry is one of our biggest stressors and it is interesting to see that how we manage our money reflects how we manage other facets of our lives. It truly comes

down to perspective and changing our attitude of being “not enough”. We are perfect as we are.

It is an empowering thought to recognize that our stress response to any storm is truly within our control. Jake Tumber is the clinic director at Reinhold Rehabilitation in Hamilton, Ontario. He has extensive experience in physiotherapy and the majority of his patients are people who have been injured in an accident and need to be rehabilitated.

During our interview, he made an important point with the rehabilitation process.

Locus of control can be empowering and therapeutic to the patient as they take on the charge themselves in their rehabilitation. When we explain how it affects pain, then people could better manage their stress and hence, manage their pain.

Tumber, 2013

He found that patients who took an active part in their therapy were more likely to heal faster. The concept of taking action in the process is empowering to his clients. When he explained the correlation between stress and pain to his clients, they were able to manage their pain more effectively when they became aware that their stress is a factor.

When they found ways to calm, whether that be through meditation tapes or an activity to shift their focus, they were embarked onto a road of healing.

Lynton Friedman of the Salwyn Wellness Centre in Toronto is a psychotherapist who also has extensive experience in helping people with stress and anxiety.

He shared with me a story that he has told his clients to teach them about the concept of finding a way to shift focus even if it is not in the traditional form of meditation:

I had a car accident a couple years ago. I was in a lot of chronic pain for a couple of years. What I would do to meditate myself when I was feeling that pain and I have used this example with my clients, is that I would take it and paint it on a canvas and I would draw intricate things onto the canvas. Then I would go and paint very specifically so that I would watch that the paint did not go over the lines. And what that does it would focus me in so in depth into what I was doing. I started to forget about the pain. I encourage people to find what interests them in that notion and using that as a form of meditation.

Friedman, 2013

Friedman reminds us that redirecting our focus from an unpleasant experience does not have to be taken in the form of the traditional idea of meditation. His story shows that even in the grips of

excruciating pain, he still had the capability to take away its intensity by merely shifting his attention to something that required absolute quiet and concentration.

His story confirms with Tumber's statement on the locus of control which shows that we are instrumental to our own healing by tapping into our own avenues of calm. We have the power to turn our mind from an unpleasant feeling to something that interests us and enjoy.

Jennifer Newman, whose practice is called Lunar Blessings, had started her path as a healer and then was introduced to Reiki. Newman currently uses Reiki as well as hypnotherapy to help her clients. She is a firm believer that perception is the culprit for many stress sufferers. She gives some sound advice when stress sets in:

Start watching yourself. Redirect your thoughts to something else such as gratitude. Look to things that you are grateful for. When you focus on these things, you start to work on the things that really matter and at the same time, you no longer allow yourself to think those thoughts that create a negative pattern.

Newman, 2013

Newman recognizes that thought patterns cause the downward spiral that most of us experience when we enroll ourselves into panicked responses.

When we are grateful to what we have presently going for us in our lives instead of thinking about what we lack, we are likely to have a more positive outlook on whatever storm may come into our path.

The key again is replacing the fear mongering and negative thought patterns to what is indeed important to us. We simply have to be grateful for

the things that we do have working for us in our lives: family, friends, our health, and the life giving earth.

Jessica Schwey is a coach, therapist, speaker, and entrepreneur who offers her services to help her clients find their balance.

She has this to say about facing challenges:

It is inevitable that huge life changes will happen. Sometimes these changes affect multiple circumstances. If, however, we were to stay calm and break things down into smaller pieces and put one foot in front of the other, things then would become less overwhelming and we would have a better chance of bypassing the feeling of “everything falling apart”.

Schwey, 2013

Schwey touches on the importance of really doing a self-check in order to allow to take an objective viewpoint of our problem. By taking steps to breaking

down our problem into smaller manageable pieces, we can feel more inclined to work through our problem in a more rational manner. From these challenges, we do learn and grow.

This chapter has the title “Quiet the Storm” and at times, the storm will come unannounced in our lives. I want to leave you with an acronym which will serve as your emergency kit when you find yourself caught in a storm and need to tap into your calm.

Here is how you quiet it:

- C** - Calm your body with breathing
A - Acknowledge the voice of worry
L - Lead your mind to a positive goal
M - Meditate by doing something that interests you

Calm Your Body



Relax your body by changing the rhythm of your breathing to controlled. Release any tension in your body.

Acknowledge Your Voice



Acknowledge the voice of worry and fear. Recognize that it is just a voice that is reacting to a phantom outcome.

Lead Your Mind



Lead your mind means redirecting your thoughts to a perceived positive outcome. The practitioners quoted in this chapter say it best when they describe that ultimately we have the control in our response to a stressful or painful experience.

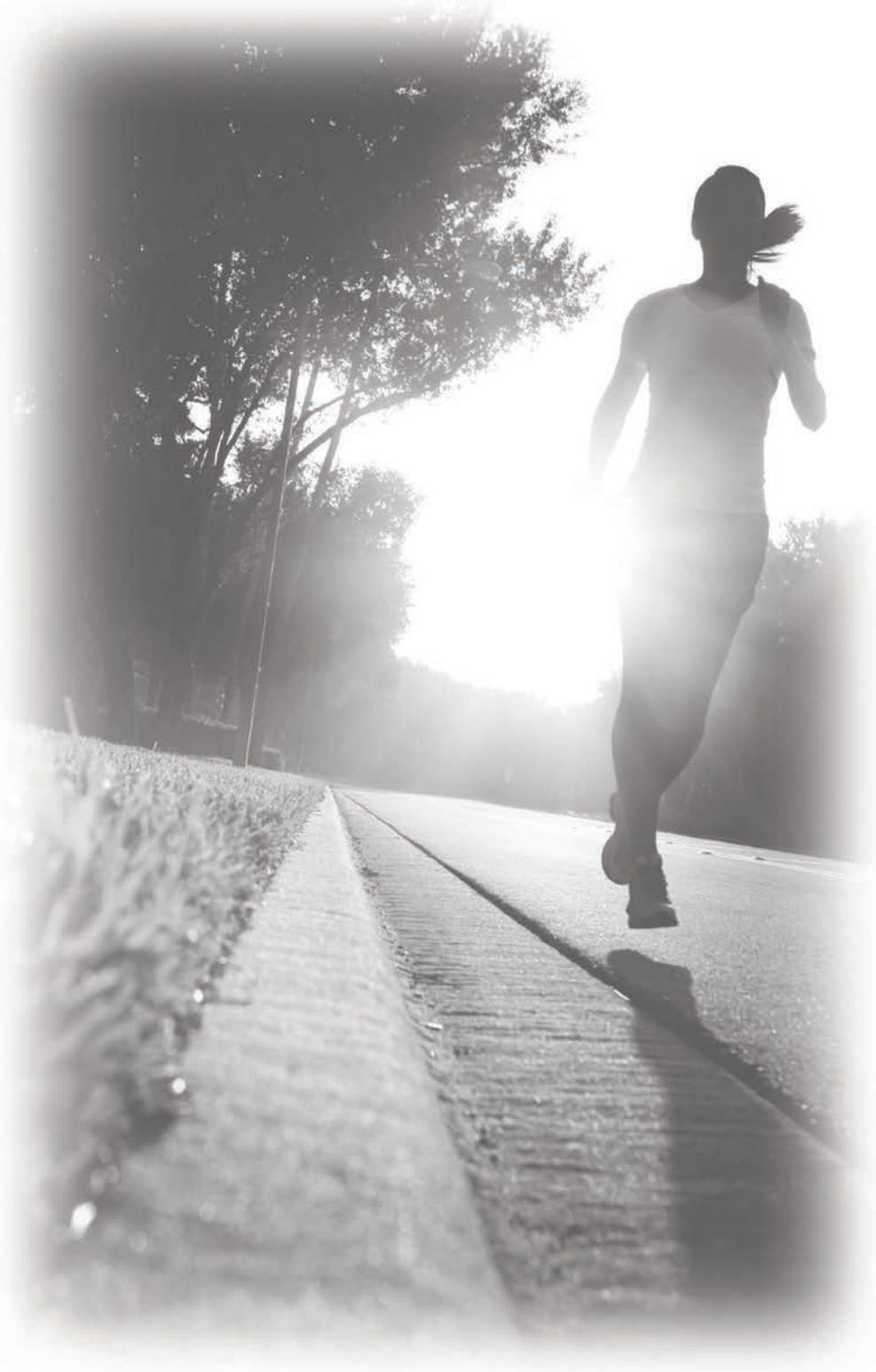
Meditate



Meditation does not have to be the traditional sit still experience. Meditation can take the form of shifting your focus from the stressor to something that you enjoy. The advice here is simply to find something that interests you and that indeed puts you into that meditative state.

Initially when I started writing about calmness, I began with the premise that perception plays a huge role when it comes to stress management and handling big life transitions.

As I began my research and interviews with wellness practitioners, I discovered that there are other facets that need to be addressed if we are to lead balanced and healthy lives. Just as the first line of defence begins with the body through breathing, one of the greatest immunities to the onslaught of stress triggers is taking care of our bodies which will be reviewed in the next chapter.



C H A P T E R F I V E

Calmness Tip 2

Taking Care of Your Body

*W*hen it comes to the body, I have a lot of knowledge that I have obtained over the years from battling with my weight and poor eating habits. The irony is that there is a wealth

of knowledge in the area of nutrition and fitness, yet we don't apply that knowledge because we are simply too busy.

So we save the little bit of time by going through drive-thrus, eating food out of a bag or a box, and planting our posteriors in front of any screen we could find to finish that task for work or catch that very important TV show.

Not only do we have not time to eat or move, we also do not have time to sleep. We even rob our brains the downtime needed to reboot and repair the body. When our bodies are not getting the proper nutrition, exercise, and sleep for its functioning needs, we rob ourselves of our wellness.

The body fights hard for homeostasis and if it does not have the resources to create physical calm, then the body eventually will break down. We become more vulnerable to the onslaught of stress triggers, when we do not take care of our bodies. Not taking

care of our bodies is essentially lacking care for ourselves.

The problem with running at top speed all the time is that it has wear and tear on our bodies. We were designed to run in short spurts to avoid that sabre tooth tiger and it was meant only for a short duration.

When we keep going for the marathon distance at high speeds without any consideration for proper fuel or rest, physical problems will no doubt occur. Taking care of our bodies is a preventative measure and immunity to handle stress. We tend to forget two things: We have to carry our bodies into our old age and it is the only one we have. We might as well give it the treatment and respect that it deserves.

Most of my poor eating habits I can attribute to my stress response. My number one excuse was not having time. Since I did not take the time to prepare my meals, I ate and overate on the run. I also ate while driving in car to get to places and it made me

an unconscious overeater. My energy was low, so my solution was to pump my body with coffee to get things done.

Dr. David Posen who is a Canadian MD based in Toronto and an expert on stress management aptly describes coffee as “stress in a cup”.

David Posen, 2012

The coined term is very fitting since basically most of us coffee drinkers rely on coffee to start us in the morning and to keep those energy levels up.

Coffee is a stimulant that sparks your sympathetic nervous system which in overdrive becomes the stress out response network. On top of eating poorly, I felt that I did not have the time to exercise. I could not get up early enough to work out before my commute, nor could I work out after a day of work because I was mentally exhausted and brought work home with me.

I would work long hours at home and would manage with five hours of sleep which were shortened on stressed induced sleepless nights. As indicated in chapter two, the body produces cortisol when running under the stress response. Cortisol is responsible for the building of abdominal (belly) fat and affects blood sugar regulation. In the matter of four years, I gained forty pounds and hit the highest weight of my life. I broke my own Guinness book of records. My body basically became a reflection of my lifestyle. The body simply does not lie: I was not taking care of myself.

On my road to calmness, I learned how quickly my body perked up when it was given the nutrition is needed. My energy levels last for the entire day and even exercise became more enjoyable. Dr. Elizabeth Sterjohann is a Naturopath who runs the Woodside Clinic in Scotland, Ontario. She spoke to me about the importance of nutrition in the combat against stress:

If you don't have the buffering system there anymore to do something about it, then you realize the stress much more quickly. Patients that I have treated directly or indirectly for their stress notice that they are able to cope more when their bodies receive the necessary nutrients.

Sterjohann ND, 2013

My interview with her helped me to put some attention to the importance of nutrition as an insurance policy to handle stressful situations.

In the wake of our fast paced first world society, we have become a malnourished society. Our modern eat on the go lifestyles has created so much imbalances in our bodies that is no wonder that cases of diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease are on the rise.

With so much chaos happening internally on the physical level, the body becomes ill-equipped to remain in balance when it faces a stressful event. So

how do we ensure that we are eating nutritionally when we have little time? Two things have to occur:

1. *You must have the desire to eat healthy. You must want to do this.*
2. *You need to set aside time to create your healthy meals. If you have a hectic week, book some time off on Sunday to cook different meals for you to have access to on the go.*

There is an effort involved in planning and creating meals. The payoff is huge in terms of maintaining energy levels and reducing your cravings for junk food. There is a huge array of eating approaches and debates on what is better for our bodies: Going low or moderate carb? Eating a Palaeolithic diet of meat and vegetables versus cutting meat out altogether?

From my personal experience of experimenting with different eating menus, I learned that balanced

eating is important. Eating too much of one source and eliminating another source is not a healthy option.

The biggest rule of thumb is to replace most of eating with whole foods as opposed to packaged and processed foods. Stick to mother earth, as opposed to chemistry lab creations. If you love the chemical food and can't part with it, have it in moderation. Ensure that at least 80% of what you put in your mouth is whole nutritious food. If it contains a long list of unpronounceable ingredients then it isn't 80% worthy.

Another tip to keep on track with healthy eating is to have a food journal. The whole point of it is not counting calories per say. It puts your mind to work and makes you aware of what you are putting into your body. Most stressful eating is unconscious eating.

The journal is not a record of when you have been naughty or nice. It simply shows you a pattern of when you may have gone off track. You also

notice your successful eating days. You become more in tune to why you resorted to eating junk food and then you make a conscious effort to eat healthy again.

The journal is to help create positive eating habits and make you aware of stressful periods that may have disrupted healthy eating. I would recommend using the journal to cement the habit of nutritional eating for 90 days. After the 90 days, use it as a reference point to keep promoting healthy eating habits.

Eating healthy is obviously an important foundation for health. The next component to ensure physical health is a no brainer: physical activity. There usually is a huge misconception about this component to health.

Most people would assume that it would mean signing up for a gym membership and going to the gym can be an intimidating experience. Physical activity can also take the form of sports, dancing,

or going for a long walk. It all depends on what you enjoy doing.

I dedicated a decade of my life going to a gym and I enjoyed it. I loved the social element to it and found group fitness motivating. I then became locked into the concept that I did not have enough time for it with my commute to work. It had been difficult for me to go back to the gym. It lost its lustre after I stopped my morning routine.

The vicious cycle continued: poor eating, lack of exercise, and little sleep. My clothes did not fit me and little tasks like snow shovelling became tiring. I knew that I had to do something. I could not go back to my old low calorie dieting techniques. That in itself is stressful on the body. I decided to lose my weight by reversing the way I gained it. Healthy eating, exercise, and sleep.

When I focused on these three concepts, the weight came off. In a span of four months, I lost 35 lbs and still keep my healthy habits.

Kasandra Monid is the Creativity and Wellness Coach Owner and founder of Thinklife Coaching has this to say about wellness and exercise:

In fact, studies increasingly show that aerobic exercise, which elevates mood-boosting hormones and neurotransmitters, is as effective as antidepressants in lowering depression, stress and anxiety. I firmly believe in the mind-body connection. A healthy mind is a healthy body and a healthy body is a healthy mind.

Monid, 2013

Monid asserts that regular exercise has mood boosting effects which contribute to one's sense of a healthy well-being. She highlights that stress can be managed effectively when we are in optimal physical and emotional health.

The benefits of physical activity are not necessarily about maintaining a healthy body weight. It is part of the paradigm of mind and

body wellness. Physical activity is necessary to keep that delicate balance – otherwise known as our inner calm.

The next important ingredient to building immunity against stressors is sleep. The National Sleep Foundation in the United States recommends 7-9 hours for adults.

Research has shown that the amount of sleep hours required depends on the individual.

National Sleep Foundation, 2013

When we deprive our bodies of sleep, we rob our body's time of a true timeout and rest. Dr. Fateh Srajeldin in our interview emphasized the importance of sleep:

Sleep is the only daily activity that prevents us from engaging in any other activity such as eating, drinking or operating a machine. Lack of sleep will always affect our decision making the next day. People should consider that sleep as a thermostat that would tell them the status of their health.

Srajeldin ND, 2013

Dr. Srajeldin stresses the importance of sleep as a recess for the body to reboot and repair itself without the interruption of other activities. There are mental, as well as physical, consequences with sleep deprivation, which can make us more susceptible to stress and often lead to poor decisions. In addition, weight gain is involved with heightened cortisol levels that are managed during sleep as well as hypertension. Not enough sleep is not giving the body enough rest.

As Dr. Srajeldin suggests, the amount of sleep is also a bench mark for wellness. To allow more sleeping

hours, I simply go to bed early to ensure that I am in the healthy range of eight hours. I get up early to fit in my exercise routine and my commute to work. All my food and clothing are packed and ready to go before I go to bed. These actions are my commitment to my well-being.

There is a mind body connection to wellness that practitioners do recognize when they are treating their clients. When the body is nourished and taken care of on the physical level, it also takes care of the mental and emotional well-being. I met with Kailee Kline the founder of Healthwinds Spa in Toronto. Kline speaks to the importance of tackling the physical layer for the health and wellness of her clients who come to her spa to decompress:

At Healthwinds, The Health and Wellness Spa we believe that wellness is the result of a conscious commitment to better the quality of our physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health. With a mind at peace, a body rested and free from pain a renewed sense of wellness can be experienced.

Kline, 2013

Kline discussed with me the work that they do in helping their clients alleviate any physical discomfort that they may be experiencing which poses as mirror to what is going on internally. The one thing that she points out is that “the body never lies.” A person may not tell that they are experiencing stress, but a sign such as muscle aches or even poor skin condition can reveal what is going on inside the individual. When they remedy the physical layer for their clients, they also give their clients a sense of renewed well-being. Dr. Leo Quan who is a chiropractor in downtown Toronto spoke about the body as our own litmus test of overall well-being:

[For our bodies to achieve inner calm] The resource is already there. We just have to get connected to it. Usually it puts itself into the form of subtle messages that your body is telling you that you are pushing too hard or that you weren't giving it enough rest. That is our source of calm being in conversation with our bodies.

Quan, 2013

Dr. Quan points out that we need to not only take of bodies, but also use our bodies as a resource to maintain calmness. He believes as most practitioners will attest to, that the body has its own wisdom. It will know how to balance itself out provided that we pay attention to its signals. Donald Currie practices hypnotherapy and sums up the mind-body connection with:

*We need to nurture all the different parts:
Nurturing the body through diet and exercise,
nurturing the mind through stimulation and
through learning, nurturing the soul and the
spirit through meditation.*

Currie, 2013

Currie explains the importance of not only nurturing the body, but also the mind as well as the emotional components which will be addressed in the next following chapters.

B.K.S. Iyengar, founder of Iyengar Yoga, sums it well with “*Your body is your temple.*” Health is our true currency and when the body is not well, it cannot do what it was designed to do which is to keep you balanced and safe. The body will exude a sense of well-being which will help to lead a life of calmness.



CHAPTER SIX

Calmness Tip 3

Accept What You Can't Control

Sometimes anxiety and stress sets in when we have a high expectation of an outcome and we are severely disappointed with the results. The feelings grow

into frustration and to some extremes; we become depressed because we have attached ourselves to that particular outcome. This repeated pattern is just our own desire for control of our external circumstances (which also includes the people in our lives).

When the Buddha was on the quest to find out why humans suffer, he finally arrived with this answer:

*“Attachment is the origin, the root of suffering;
hence it is the cause of suffering.”*

Dalai Lama, 1988

The basis of Buddhism is detaching oneself from all things, thoughts, and circumstances.

When we identify our self-worth or even our success by betting on external events or on people's behavior, we will find that they will not always work in our favour. The reason is that events and people's actions are external. At the same time, they also have no bearing on who we are, nor have any

power over our personal success. We are the owners of our feelings, and our actions in response to our environment and to other people's behaviors.

One hard lesson that I learned about relinquishing control was during my father's degrading health and subsequently his death. My father went to emergency due to a very low heart rate that was giving him fainting spells. He had surgery to put in a pacemaker, but had a bad bout of pneumonia where his lung capacity never recovered. To this day, it is still unexplained why his lungs all of a sudden failed him. He was never a smoker and that was the same question asked of us every time by every health professional. Putting that aside, the result was that he was dependent on an oxygen tank which neither he nor us would accept as his fate.

The whole affair was heartbreaking. Here was a man that was active and healthy. He went for long walks and enjoyed learning things. Once he had to wear his nosepiece and lug around an oxygen tank, he became very depressed. For seven months, he

rarely laughed or smiled. We all did our best to keep positive and strongly believed that he would somehow get better to the point where he would not need to be on oxygen anymore. This is what we all wanted to believe, including my father.

My father would not accept his circumstances. He would even try to breathe without the oxygen tank which may have made his predicament worse for him. I would encourage him to do his exercises and even go out with the oxygen tank. I kept pushing him to keep moving to get better. In hindsight, I realized that I was not accepting the change either. I wanted my other father back. Both of us were not allowing ourselves to face the situation as is.

Seven months later, the oxygen was not working him anymore and he was admitted to the hospital. Three days later, he passed on. Just a few hours before he passed away, I was with my Dad and had spent the night at the hospital. I was waiting for my brother-in-law, Joe, to come by to relieve me for the night. My father had an oxygen mask that covered

his nose and mouth. He tried to speak, the gush of air was too much and we could barely hear him. Then I looked at him and said, "I love you, Dad." He answered with, "Me, too." I would never have imagined that would be our last exchange.

This was the man who was the nurturing parent of my life. He was always there for me. He taught me to read with his ESL books. He lectured me when I was out of line. He would drive back and forth to university when I spent the weekends or holidays at home. He was there every step of the way.

For those of you who have had loved ones passed on, you can also appreciate how death is completely surreal. It felt like he was away at some excursion that he used to go on and that he would be back. It is the most weird feeling experience for someone to be physically moved out of your life forever.

During the funeral, I remained calm and I thought that perhaps it was shock that made me feel like some unmoveable stone. I should be crying uncontrollably.

I should be in a mess. It was not like I was stone that didn't have any feelings. I did feel the sadness. In that state, I was to be strong and be present for my family during that difficult period.

Afterwards, the calm never wore off. Of course there was some bouts of sadness and tears. There was a willingness on my part to let go of my father. I wanted him to be happy wherever he may be. He always sacrificed his happiness for others. The time is now his to be free and happy. And that means to be free from our grieving thoughts.

At a subconscious level, I was telling myself that we were all going to be fine and that we will adjust to this shocking change. I accepted that he was no longer with us and that his existence has taken on another form: he is now alive in my memories.

There were no regrets between us. I knew that I did what I could to help him and be there for him just as he has been there for me. I could not stop his death.

From this experience, I learned that I had the capability to allow acceptance to set in. I could have carried the grief for months or even until years. I cannot advise that this will be the way for everyone to handle their grief.

What I could say is that we just have to deal with the moment at hand in any way that befits us. I was unable to accept his health degradation at the time; yet it was his death that pushed me to accept the change in the dynamic of our family.

When we try to control our environment and people for that matter, we become so attached to our own visions of "how things should be". My sisters and I were banking on my father to get better and come off the oxygen tank. Ultimately, this fixation led to a stressful and unhappy existence for all of us. My father rarely smiled during those seven months up to his death.

He gave up doing the things he once enjoyed doing because he could not live with being on oxygen.

His perception of his predicament as a death sentence virtually led to his declining sense of well-being and ultimately his death. He, as well as us, could not come to terms with the change. Although we cannot change the past, if we, as well as my father, just rolled with the status quo, those last months may not have been so miserable for him. Again this is all in hindsight.

I interviewed Renee Pilgrim who is an acupuncturist and she gave me some interesting insights around the realm of acceptance:

We have to remind ourselves and others that the stressful circumstances are part of the human experience that will never be eradicated from the world as we know it. But living in a different relationship with it, is completely possible and necessary if we are to live full and healthy emotional lives.

Pilgrim Rtmp, 2013

Pilgrim makes an interesting statement about “having a different relationship” with the stressful circumstance. As she indicates, these occurrences naturally will not become extinct from our lives; however, changing our view of the situation and approaching it without getting entangled, will change the intensity of its grip. Switching this view is being in the space of relinquishing control.

We end up just adjusting our response to the external circumstance – with calm. The shift of our relationship to the storm is within the scope of control. As indicated in Chapter 3, quieting that storm also involves cutting it down to size and making it more manageable. This can only occur when we allow a state change.

Debra Jones is a natural healing facilitator who helps her clients to achieve wellness at her calming facility in Shelbourne, Ontario. She firmly believes that we all have the capabilities within to heal ourselves. Her view on this process is as follows:

Stress is a choice. You can only move away from stress is when you choose to. One of my most cherished quotes is from a religious leader named Dieter F. Uchtdorf who quoted this: "Healing comes when we choose to walk away from darkness and move towards a brighter light." When you say it is choice, that gives you power right away.

Jones, 2013

Jones emphasizes the idea that we can choose physically or mentally to move away from an upsetting situation. When we remove ourselves from a stressful event, we give ourselves a space to heal. It is in that space that we are able to open ourselves up to other perspectives other than our own. We then are able to liberate ourselves from the circumstance because we no longer are stuck in our one-sided view of the storm.

"Seeing the big picture" is crucial to practicing calmness since it turns the storm into something less menacing and doable to tackle.

Sandra Piacentini is the founder of the Boyle House Wellness Centre which is located in the downtown area of my birthplace: Brampton, Ontario. She touches on the concept of "seeing the bigger picture" when practicing calmness. She confirms that calmness is a practice that helps place mindfulness into action. Seeing the big picture and being persistent to practicing calm is key, as she states:

You have to kind of step back and look at the big picture. You look at what you are challenged with right now and ask yourself, what can you do? You examine your options. Practicing calmness is like practicing meditation where you need to be persistent.

Piacentini, 2013

Piacentini reveals the importance of “stepping back” to get a bird’s eye view of one’s challenge. In viewing the situation from this distance, we are able to see clearly options that presented to us. Instead of getting caught in the maelstrom, she suggests that we assess the challenge that has appeared to us in the moment. We then can weigh our options with a clear calm mind. She also adds that calmness is a practice. We have to remind ourselves to give the space to be calm.

In essence, when you accept the elements that you can’t control, you, ironically, become empowered with managing your own stress response. Once you are in this space, you will be able to see solutions much more readily and will be able to welcome new opportunities for a fresher and more meaningful life. One of our many obstacles in our modern living is this incessant need to race through our lives to move towards a far reaching future. The next chapter will cover the importance of slowing down and enjoying life in the present moment.

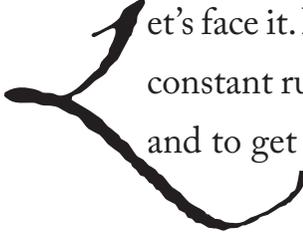


C H A P T E R S E V E N



Calmness Tip 4

Walk, Don't Run



Let's face it. In the modern world, we are in a constant rush to get to places, to do things, and to get instant gratification. We don't

pause nor slow our pace down to notice what is working for us in our lives. We could blame modern times that demand we move at the same pace as technology.

Despite the intricacies of modern living, we still get to choose to run or to walk. There has been research on the impact of technology on stress which has been coined as “techno stress” in 1984 by clinical psychologist, Dr. Craig Boyd. Katherine Walz, in her scholarly journal, researched the topic of techno stress as it impacts our lifestyles:

While constant connectivity via new technologies might have benefits for some, it also comes at the cost of blurring work-home boundaries by providing increased access to work and to individuals. Constant connectivity provided by information communication technologies invades on the personal space of individuals and creates the challenge of managing a work life balance.

Walz, 2012

As a result, the idea of having a “time out” of any kind is non-existent in a world that constantly needs to be “on” with our communication devices. The personal space and family space is compromised as a result of this “perceived need” to stay connected for work or a virtual community of friends.

An article from the Huffington post indicates that research shows that using technology one to two hours before bedtime can increase stress levels

Volpi MD, 2012

The reason for it is that your brain becomes over-stimulated from the use of the device and consequently, does not shut down when you attempt to sleep. What is the solution to the information overload madness? We can create boundaries.

Similar to the technique of a state change, we can make a choice to disconnect ourselves from technology to give us the much needed downtime. There is a movement in the United States that calls for people of

the Jewish faith to participate in National Unplugged Day. The idea is to practice a secular Sabbath by disconnecting oneself from technology. The whole concept was created by a group of Jewish artists who run a non-profit organization called Reboot.

The movement caught the eye of a self-proclaimed techno-addict and journalist with the New York Times. In his article, *I Need a Virtual Break. No, Really*, Mark Bittman quotes that he had found his calm by simply giving himself breaks from technology:

Once I moved beyond the fear of being unavailable and what it might cost me, I experienced what, if I wasn't such a skeptic, I would call a lightness of being. I felt connected to myself rather than my computer. I had time to think, and distance from normal demands. I got to stop.

Bittman, 2008

Bittman recognizes that there is a need to step out from the buzz and noise of technology in order to achieve serenity in one's life. He made an interesting comment that he felt more connected to himself than to his computer. Our compulsive behavior to keep answering our emails or checking our text messages does not allow for a space of calm. The obsessiveness to stay connected is stemmed in worry. This is the same worry that triggers our stress responses.

When we look at this compulsive behavior from a bigger perspective, we can see that we are revving our bodies up to rally against an ungrounded fear. You will still be alive. You will still be loved. You will still be you. The world will still move on regardless of you not replying to that email right away.

Our world is still abundant with new opportunities. We just have been programmed to believe otherwise. Ruchi Shetty, in our interview, noted that even on vacation, people still bring their laptops with them. She goes on further to express the importance of letting go:

I had a student in my Art of Living breathing class who was forced by his wife to attend. He had high blood pressure, which is often triggered by stress. After the 6-day breathing clinic, he reported feeling lighter, was grateful his wife had pushed him into the course, and his blood pressure had normalized.

Shetty ND, 2013

Shetty emphasizes that we have to change our view of stress management as a separate entity that must be controlled. Instead of putting our energies in trying to “kill the stress beast”, we simply just let go of it by entering into a more calming state of being. And in doing so, we are no longer rushing to squashing the stressor. We are walking towards it and meeting it with a more rationalized stance.

Her student was able to change his state and in doing so, impacted his health in a positive way once he put breathing techniques into practice. He

undoubtedly used breathing as mechanism to make a space for his hectic lifestyle.

Barry Godson who is a registered massage therapist (RMT) based in the Yonge and St. Clair area of Toronto. He was the massage therapist for the show “So You Think You Can Dance Canada” during its four year production. He practices cranial sacral therapy on his clients and is a great believer in the need for us all to slow down and step off our hamster wheels as he aptly describes it. He advises this:

The pace and complexity of modern life puts a strain on our health and well-being. We need to first slow down and really watch our habit patterns and how we spend our time. It's just like writing down everything we eat and counting calories except now we will be watching where our time and energy go. With clarity, you can stop draining your energy and begin to use the same time in the service of well-being.

Godson RMT, 2013

Godson pinpoints one of the inherent problems that lend to our fast paced living which is: the perception that there is not “enough time”. He suggests that if we were to sit down and track how we spend our time, we will notice areas where we have been using it in unproductive ways to our health and well-being.

When we are able to see this then we are able to redirect our energy and focus to activities that promote wellness. Instead of living our lives racing against the clock, we can live our lives feeling more at ease that time is not against us, but working for us.

When we take the time to slow down and develop an awareness of our stress signals, we create a great shift in the mind, spirit, and physical dimensions for wellness. Nadine Feldman is a Certified Senior TRAGER® Practitioner who showed me the TRAGER® Approach during our discussion about achieving calmness. She gave me some remarkable insights when it came to stopping to be in tune with

our body movements which instantly enters us into a most serene state:

Part of The TRAGER® Approach is teaching people Mentastics® (mental gymnastics). Developing awareness of the signals we receive that stress and anxiety are building up inside and then managing those signals with these gentle none or two minutes of easy movements combined with inquiring “what could be softer here?” or “how could this feel easier?”, we align the body and mind.

Feldman CSTP, 2013

Feldman applied the TRAGER® Approach on me. I was fascinated by her ability to guide my body to relax and let go. She points out the necessity of us to shift our awareness to our bodies and notice the areas of tension. When we give that attention, we allow ourselves to be in tune with our bodies. We liberate it from the barrage of stressful thoughts and let it do what it knows best to relax and be calm.

She states that bringing non-judgement takes us out of ourselves and out of our negative thought patterns that often disconnect us from our bodies and blur our perception of reality. Making this quiet time not only connects ourselves on a mental, emotional realm, but also on the physical layer which is important for our health and longevity.

Karen Hill, a Reiki practitioner based in Toronto, shared with me an interesting story about a client who completely transformed himself as a result of attending her sessions.

In her Reiki practice, she recalls treating a “very logical man who was in finance, who tended to fall asleep during his sessions”. Though he felt conflicted about ‘taking time for himself’, he wanted to book appointments regularly during RRSP season because he felt Reiki helped his ability to positively cope.

It was an unusual experience for Karen to witness a client habitually sleep through sessions, yet she

observed this individual make remarkable life changes during his year of treatment.

“He started walking daily, he changed his diet and he dropped a significant amount of weight. He also chose to close his business, buy a boat and go on an extended tour of the Mediterranean. Upon his return he said he didn’t know how Reiki worked, yet his life had changed as a result of receiving treatment.”

Hill, 2013

Hill’s remarkable account is a stark example of what happens when we allow a space for quiet in our lives. Her client was living a highly stressed existence. When he went to her Reiki sessions, with her help, he was able to rebalance himself. His sense of being in balance had led him to adopt healthy habits and then to a better life quality. All of this occurred because he made the choice to give himself that space to connect with himself through the avenue of Reiki.

Therefore, he also opened himself up to new possibilities which probably appeared unfathomable in the life he had lived before his reiki sessions.

In my interview with Jodie Lindley, who was a RMT for twelve years and changed her direction as a teacher, writer, and astrologer who leads group meditations. She discussed with me the importance of creating that time for silence for oneself:

“Make time for silence. That could be just sitting for five minutes and breathing. Feeling that you are alive. Feeling the breath going into your lungs. Feeling your feet. Connecting with the body. Be with yourself. It is in that space that you might see who you are.”

Lindley, 2013

She stresses that having quiet is not only to reconnect with our bodies, but taking the moment to really be with ourselves devoid of any thoughts or any noise that tears us from being anything otherwise.

When we stop running, we can finally be okay with where and who we are.

When we make a conscious choice to take the time to walk, we open ourselves up to new opportunities as we make our life journeys. Ralph Waldo Emerson quoted this famous line: *“It is the journey, not the destination.”* It is through the journey that we transform.

Transformation is not fixated on how much time we have, nor can it be rushed. We can only move forward to a better version of ourselves when we truly take the time to learn the way to our life vision. Time is never the enemy. So no need to rush. Walk it through.

At times, we usually run because we are either afraid that we will miss something in the future or we are running away from something that happened in the past. In both instances, we are racing towards phantom outcomes derived from fears. Choose to live in the present moment to calm those worries and fears.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Calmness Tip 5

Live in the Present Moment

Remember the famous George Orwell quote from his novel, 1984: “*Those who control the past, control the future.*” The funny thing is “the present” is left out.

The reason is that in this Orwellian society, Big Brother was able to control people through the fear of the unknown and the intangible. They could re-invent the past as well as the future in order to keep in people in check.

What is most interesting about this Big Brother tactic is that we do the exact same thing to ourselves when we run amuck with our stress responses. We terrorize ourselves with something that has happened in the past (which we cannot change) or with an imagined event in the future (which does not exist).

Eckhart Tolle states that our continual denial of living in the present is the source of our unhappiness and non-fulfillment:

“All negativity is caused by an accumulation of psychological time and denial of the present. Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry – all forms of fear – are caused by too much future, and not enough presence. Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of unforgiveness are caused by too much past, and not enough presence.”

Tolle, 1997

The whole business in living in the present is actually “to be present”. When we are not caught in our negative thoughts of what is past and what it to come, we open up a space for ourselves and in that space; we can contribute our talents to the world at large. We are able to really listen to others instead of being wrapped in our own worlds. We truly can be of service to another when we live in the present moment.

The first step to be “in the present” is to accept all past event as they are. They cannot be re-written nor changed. Those moments are done and gone. All you can do is learn from them.

In terms of the future, as indicated in the last chapter, we must concentrate on the journey. Live moment by moment towards any future destination. We don't need to put our lives on hold for the sake of a future that has yet to come into existence.

Calmness comes through when we live now as we learn and practice to improve and transform as we move towards our goals. Dr. Eva Witkowska is a psychotherapist and counsellor who conducts her sessions at the Chopra Wellness Centre in Toronto.

In our conversation, she touched on the importance of living in the moment and this is what she advises when handling a stressful situation:

“Going down to one moment and one person at a time, remember that there is “nothing” to be accomplished. This is just practice. We already practice in every moment thinking in certain way, speaking in a certain way, and being in a certain way. Be aware of what you are doing today. If it is something that is not nurturing you, let it go.”

Witkowska E., 2013

Dr. Witkowska suggests that we can identify what may not be working for us and be okay to dismiss it. Just as thinking, speaking, and being in a certain way is a practice, we can apply that principle when infusing calmness into a stressful moment.

Living in the present allows us to be made available to others, since we no longer become absorbed with the “me” of the past and the future. The fears of what

others think or what they will do in a certain situation starts to dissipate.

This is all due to the fact that you are no longer attached to outcomes that simply do not exist. I had the opportunity to speak with Alain Richard who is the founder of Mondoki. He helps clients achieve healthy and balanced living through the methods of Qi Gong, Nutritional Cleansing, and Reiki.

He voiced the importance of keeping the windows and doors of communication open with others.

“Take time to communicate. Communication is always good. Sometimes the unsaid things can make things more difficult. A lot of people tend to avoid communication because it can pose a mirror that they do not want to look at or face.”

Richard, 2013

When we do away with “the unsaid things” which builds up a residue of resentment overtime,

we are able to maintain healthy and nurturing relationships that bear no dark secrets. I have seen that same communication breakdown not only in close relationships, but also in work relationships.

This all goes back to either an experience from the past that created a judgement on that individual or an imagined negative outcome. Both instances are governed by fear. When we choose to do away with both, we become the instruments of a healthy environment for all.

Living in the present also means celebrating the good moments as well as the challenging ones. Acknowledging what they are: milestones to better and better.

Tanya Pillal, a hypnotist, based in Toronto, moved toward hypnotism from her own personal journey of relief from physical, mental, and emotional stress. She made a point with me about practicing gratitude in our lives and that we should celebrate good moments along with our challenging ones:

By consciously celebrating our accomplishments as they happen, no matter how small, the mind and body gently start to believe that life can be manageable and even enjoyable.

This belief can then put stressful times into their rightful place: challenges are opportunities for personal growth.

Pillal, 2013

Pillal establishes that celebrating our accomplishments strengthen us to manage our challenging moments as they are: benchmarks for personal growth. We are then able to process those negative instances from a detached perspective which will allow us to view them as milestones for transformation.

Instead of focusing on negative situations, we diffuse its emotional power by stepping from them and becoming a learning observer. This again can

only be done when we choose to live within the present moment.

I also visited Ayurveda Rituals in Toronto which is founded by Andrea Olivera. The goal in the Ayurvedic practice is to help others find their natural blueprint and live accordingly to their natural life flow. Andrea Olivera describes stress as a result of fear consciousness:

Stress comes in when there is a lack of knowledge. Without that information, people continue to spin and go into their anxiety. This fear based consciousness can be changed by learning to understand the reasons why this happen, the reasons why people behave the way they do.

Olivera, 2013

Instead of living in that fear based consciousness, Olivera suggests that we have to make ourselves aware as to why we are reacting in such a way in a certain situation or why do we tend to attract the same patterns.

She attributes the stress cycle in her clients as a lack of knowledge and when it is attained, the stress and anxiety disappears. We can educate ourselves about our stressful situations by taking the time to acknowledge them as they are in the present moment and in their present form.

Mindfulness is having the ability to take notice of your thoughts and your environment as a detached observer. This ability to be “that observer” is one of the key ingredients to tapping into our inner network of calm.

It is being aware of the emotions that you are feeling, the space that you are walking into, and people (as well as things) that also exist in the environment that you share with them.

When we live in the present moment and do not get fixated on either the past or the future, we can live a life of calm sanity. We can see events as they are: good teachers. Solutions to challenges arrive easily with calm.



C H A P T E R N I N E



Calmness Tip 6

Solutions Arrive Easily with Calmness

“...think of the solution, not the problem. If your mind was filled only with thoughts of why you were going to lose, then you couldn't think of how to win.”

Goodkind, 1997

Jerry Goodkind is the author of the fantasy series, *Sword of Truth*. His protagonist, Richard, echo these words to remind other characters (and even his readers) the importance of being open to solutions rather than being stuck in their problem.

When we are no longer trapped by our negative thoughts, solutions and opportunities arrive on the horizon because we've kicked out the gunk that has been preventing us from seeing them clearly.

When I was living in Japan, I made a trip to Osaka and booked my stay at a hostel for two nights. The hostel was filthy and very noisy. I just didn't feel comfortable staying there. There was something sinister about it. I couldn't place my finger on it.

I asked the clerk at the front desk if they could find me another room and she said she couldn't accommodate me. I was not happy with her reply, so I told the clerk that I wanted to stay just for one night. She stated that she could not refund me, so I

became belligerent about not getting my money back for the second night.

She called the owner who then told her to kick me out of the hostel without any refund. I was then escorted to my room by an employee to take my stuff from my room and get ready to leave.

During the whole time, she was on the phone with the owner and they were insulting me. They had the upper hand since I was a foreigner not only to the city, but also to the country. I asked the clerk to speak to the owner who was on the phone, but the owner refused to speak to me. I didn't get angry about the insults. I just felt sorry for her. She was behaving like a mindless puppet who was cajoling her boss for some reason.

She seemed to mimick every word he said to her on the phone like a parrot to make him feel justified. At this moment, she was in his good books by being his co-conspirator. This was her life. When I realized that this was a no win situation, I decided to leave graciously.

While I was waiting at the elevator, I heard the clerk say to the owner that I was leaving and that I was very nice about it. Again, very odd behavior. So, I walked out in the streets of Osaka looking for a place in the dead of the night. I could have been wrapped in my frustration and anger, but I left it behind me. I just focused on finding a place to stay.

I called many hotels only to find them to be already booked. After many calls, I finally found one and it turned out to be much nicer than the one before. I learned two things from that experience: I got what I deserved for being belligerent and secondly, the moment I was calm, I was able to make a quick decision to drop the conflict and simply find another place to stay.

I asked my interviewees about what one should do to find their calm when they are stuck in a situation. David Patchell-Evans (known as Patch), owner of the Goodlife Fitness gyms across Canada, answered the question matter-of-factly with “*know what you*

want.” He even goes further to say that when we are stuck with a problem:

“It’s okay not to have an answer. You may not be even asking the right questions. You can get hyper anxious or frozen in your circle of thoughts. Without any purpose you need to just either stop or accept or change the question. Or think about something different.”

Patchell-Evans, 2013

Patchell-Evans affirms that focusing on a goal will help us move through our challenges. Instead of getting anxious or stuck in our thoughts about a problem, he advises to change our state by making a choice to either stop when we are doing something unproductive, accept the circumstance “as is” or simply change course. In essence, when we choose that vision, we stay on course.

Sometimes we are stuck in a situation, we may not have that vision on hand to pull us out of the

quick sand. There are times that we can look to other sources that serve as examples of calm.

Marlene Kennedy is founder of Your Body Tells the Truth. She has close to twenty years' experience in the area of holistic health arena and is an expert in practicing mindfulness.

She gave me a wonderful reminder about the calming quality that nature has on us when we take the time to be with it. I have always felt that nature manages to balance me out.

Over the years, I made it a habit to visit a park by the lake whenever I felt burdened with a problem and somehow, I would always go home with a sobering thought that would point me to a solution. Here is her advice about overcoming any problem:

Nature is our teacher. Nature is neutral. Nature is not positive or negative. And if we can live our lives neutrally, we would be much happier individuals for that. We can see the simplicity and the beauty in 'what is'. Not expecting to be something other than 'what it is'.

Kennedy M., 2013

Kennedy makes the assertion that nature is indeed a neutral energy. We should look to nature to teach us about “being calm”.

When we achieve taking a neutral stance with our problem, we will be able to allow opportunities into our lives and let solutions work for us without the emotional and mental tags that weigh our problems down with.

When a problem strikes, we need to step back and really ask ourselves what we are learning from this situation.

Sylvia Plester-Silk, the founder of On-Purpose Consulting, about discussed with me the role that challenges play in our lives.

Her expertise lies on helping corporations with open communication, with dealing with change, and with managing work stress. When faced with a problem she advises:

“Stop to ask yourself during the moment what is the higher purpose even if you don’t understand in the moment. It is a matter of letting go of the old and bringing in the new.”

Plester-Silk, 2013

In the eye of the storm, Plester-Silk advises that we should truly take a moment to step out of it and really ask what is indeed the higher purpose. Plester-Silk shared with me an interesting experience that she had which illustrated this concept:

I had a challenging return from vacation – driving home from two glorious weeks at my cottage, I was quickly re-oriented to the world when I drove over the crest of hill only to meet a large pickup truck that was passing others and driving directly toward me in my lane. I had to drive on the gravel shoulder to avoid a head on collision. Gratefully, no contact was made.

Arriving home late, exhausted and stressed, and yet still needing to prepare for an early meeting the next day, I proceeded to turn on my laptop, and began to print the necessary documents. My printer ran out of paper, resulting in my running up the stairs where I tripped and dropped my new laptop. Which destroyed the hard drive and would no longer work. I headed off to bed, unable to sleep.

The next morning, I woke and set my UPS for my drive to Toronto – as I rounded the curve onto the Gardiner expressway, my GPS indicated it could no longer calculate my route and shut down. Now feeling stressed, I attempted to discover how I would find the hotel where the meeting was being held.

Sunday, I took my laptop into the store to have it repaired, thankfully with a promise of being able to pick it up the following day.

Monday morning, we drove to Kitchener to pick up my initial shipment of books which had just been released – feeling the bliss of a great accomplishment. We drove on the Expressway to the 401 and between Cambridge and Guelph, my car died – that’s right no CPR, not fixable – requiring towing.

We were fortunate in that the tow truck driver quickly arrived and was amazing! We had the car towed to a garage who informed it was not fixable. By noon that day we were looking at new vehicles.

Now I have a fixed laptop, with a slight upgrade to the hard drive, a brand new car with a new GPS. It was simply time for me to let go of the old and invite in the new.

Plester-Silk, 2013

Plester-Silk reminds us that when problems arise, we just need to be willing to go with the flow and let go of the old way of doing things. In her story, she met one dilemma after another and chose to move forward. She did not allow herself to get fixated on the small changes that were occurring in her life.

She accepts her experience as a signal to “*let go of the old and invite the new.*” In order to allow solutions to arrive, we have to let go of our old way of seeing and doing things. And it is only when we stop mourning over the old that we can move forward with the new and improved.

To sum up, solutions will arrive with calm when we can do the following:

1. *Know what we want and stay on course with our goal(s).*
2. *Take a neutral stance on the situation which we can mimic from nature.*
3. *Be prepared to let go of the old way of doing and thinking in order to welcome new solutions.*

By following these steps, we prevent ourselves from getting caught up in our drama. Instead, we focus on the solution and do it with steadiness and with certainty that everything will fall into place.



C H A P T E R T E N



Calmness Tip 7

Remember Every Time.
Everything Falls into Place.

The most successful people in the world happened to be at the right place and the right time.

Jane Folger, in her e-zine, *4 Billionaires That Were In The Right Place At The Right Time*, wrote a piece that looks into the backgrounds of billionaires such as Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey who became successful because of the “*right time, right place*” motto.

Bill Gates was 20 years old during a time where computers were not as accessible. His school had a fundraising campaign that gave them computer time access to the General Electric Computer. He and his classmate, Paul Allen, became interested in computer programming and took advantage of their computer access.

In 1975, they founded Microsoft and created an operating program for their first microcomputer.

In 1980, they launched the MS-DOS program which became the operating system for IBM computers. Gates’ success can be attributed to being able to have access to computers when everyone did not which led to personal computers in every home.

Oprah Winfrey worked at a local radio station during her last year of high school and last two years of college. She became the youngest news anchor and first African-American female to be working for the Nashville radio station. She later moved to Baltimore to co-anchor the 6pm news. Her warm personality, sense of humor, and empathy caught notice by her viewers when she became a talk show co-host in Baltimore which eventually landed her in Chicago with her famed show.

The show surpassed Donahue and changed to a show that delved into important social and cultural topics. Her success is due to the fact that she made herself accessible to public.

She became a much needed female role model who is willing to address important social matters. She became an icon of compassion and philanthropy in our era.

Folger, 2011

How do these stories have anything to do with calmness? For one, to gain that calm confidence, one really has to be secure in the belief that no matter what the outcome may be, everything eventually falls into place.

In the previous chapter, we looked at the importance of staying on target in order to be open to new opportunities and new solutions. Similarly, these two individuals followed their passion and allowed themselves to live in the land of possibilities despite the challenges that they may have faced.

Bill Gates may have been viewed as being too young to be taken seriously by IBM. Where Oprah Winfrey had a hard time adjusting in Baltimore because she was the only black female anchorwoman at the station and she sensed that many people did not think she belonged there.

Even in the face of their obstacles, they both met their success because they were determined,

confident, and flexible to whatever fell on their laps which brought their success.

When I decided not to stay in the corporate sector, I was in a state of readiness. I had applied to other jobs for many months, but did not get any bites. Despite the failed attempts, I was confident that somehow my life would lead to another direction. I just didn't know what it was at the time.

The moment came to me when I opened up *The Metro*, which is a free commuter paper that I saw an ad that said, you can teach ESL overseas. I recalled a friend of a colleague of mine that I met when I was in university. She had just come back teaching ESL in Japan. I remember wanting to do the same, but never believing that it would be possible for me.

My story at the time was that I had lack of funds and strict Portuguese parents who simply would not support me in this venture. This time I knew that I had the money and the freedom this time to go.

I took the ESL certification course and applied to some schools, but did not get accepted.

Weird things started to happen that year to confirm that I was on the right track. I met a woman out of the blue on the commuter train who saw that I was studying Japanese. She called her Japanese friend on the phone to teach me some Japanese words.

I then took a trip to San Francisco to participate in a personal growth course and I met a Japanese English Teacher who was leading a group of Japanese students on a streetcar. I bought a dish set and was not aware until I saw that it was made in Japan.

All of these things occurred to me at random, but somehow were confirming my desire to live there. I finally applied to three more recruiting offices in Toronto and finally was offered a job to teach in the spring. It was while living in Japan that I learned to practice calmness and led to me writing this book.

In order to be open and let things fall into place, we have to somehow surrender to the very sanity (calmness) that we seek. Dr. Tifrah Warner is a psychologist and teaches at York University. She is a worldly person who has practiced mindfulness and yoga for many years. She says this about the state of calmness:

Calmness is really our nature. That's why we want it because we want ourselves. We don't want anything that is not us, that is foreign to us, or is outside of us. When we say we want "Calmness" we say we want to be ourselves.

Warner, 2013

Calmness is our natural pursuit. We all seek happiness and we have been sold happiness in the form of attaining external things.

Dr. Warner reminds us that calmness is truly something that we all have inside us. The pursuit should be done within oneself as opposed to outside oneself.

*This idea is not a new one. One of my all-time favourite authors, Paulo Coelho, in his book *The Alchemist* says something along the lines that when we pursue our personal story, the universe conspires to help us.*

Coelho, 1993

Everything strives for that balance whether that be physically, emotionally and mentally.

We are designed intuitively to move towards a balanced existence. Trixie Kennedy is a Feng Shui practitioner who helps her clients create balanced spaces with Feng Shui at energyemporium.ca. She tells me that balance is fundamentally expressed down to the Feng Shui tool:

Balance is the key. Even if you look at a simple Bagua map which is a foundational Feng Shui tool, you will notice that it is a complete square -- a complete area, with 4 equal sides. Often we talk about completeness; however we neglect to view things from a balanced perspective.

Kennedy T., 2013

Kennedy stresses the importance of having a balanced perspective when we want to strive for completeness, or fulfillment. She says the Bagua map is an illustration that all four sides are equal and are a complete area. The map is a symbol of stability and unwavering strength that is crucial in order to work through any challenge. Even down to the tool, balance is at work to invite that peace into our lives.

Even though balance is what we all strive for in order to have serenity in our lives, attitude is also crucial in creating this space of being at the right place and time.

Ivan Starvoresky is a NLP practitioner who speaks to the importance of managing our attitudes in order to create that space for opportunities:

You have to constantly train your attitude whether through an inspirational book, watching an educational movie, or even physical exercise. You develop this winner attitude where you overcome smaller challenges and becoming greater in the environment and even in yourself.

Starvoersky, 2013

Our attitude plays a huge weighing factor when it comes to living a calming existence. We, in the end, still have to choose to move towards a steady and balanced existence. It is there before us and we just have to have the attitude to allow us to see it; move towards it.

Ananda Shakti, a teacher in Yoga Nidra (a form of Ayurvedic Yoga) at Sanada.ca, also warns us about

attitude and how it can entraps us with the stories that we create for ourselves:

We have a main theme, A LIFE STORY, a kind of wounding that is consistent with us for our whole life. FROM A YOGIC perspective, we focus more on the fact that our ego structure is identified with this STORY and it's actually a false identity, THAN ON THERAPY FOR THE STORY.

Shakti, 2013

Life stories we create in our heads keep us from enjoying a life of vitality and infinite possibilities. The stories we tend to create brings tension and worry into our lives. We start to view the world as a place of lack and worry. The moment we move out of our stories, the opposite perception moves in which is a life abundant and filled with new opportunities.

It was through my living challenges in Japan that I learned to master my worry and panic. My first

initiation occurred on my first night in Japan. I was dropped off at my apartment by a placement agent who happened to be an ex-pat like myself.

The apartment was tiny and may have been under 200 square feet. It had sliding doors to separate the sleeping space from the kitchen. I went to my sleeping area to unpack the futon that the agency had provided for me which was basically a sleeping mat with a comforter and pillow. I saw that it started to rain outside when I looked out the sliding doors that went out to the balcony from my sleeping space. I turned around and could see something dark moving up the side of my fridge in my kitchen space. I moved closer to see. It was bunch of moving bugs crawling upwards, they were on the walls, and along the counter.

I realized what they were: cockroaches. I opened the door to my tiny bathroom and there they were on the counter next to the mirror. It was like a horror flick. I went into my bedroom space and discovered the climbing on the walls and in my closet.

Then, I thought to myself at that given moment, “Oh my god. I gave up my job, my condo, and my family for this?” I just cried and just froze for a few minutes. I called the contact to the apartment agency to inform him about my living arrangements. He told me that I did not have a new place to go. They will try to look for another apartment, but it was difficult to find any available spots in the city.

I had no choice, but to accept my living arrangements. The funny thing was that I started to adapt. The cockroaches somehow stayed out of my sleeping space and out of the bathroom.

Every morning, I would slide my door and I would see some crawling on the floor and I would stomp on them to kill them. When I came home at night from training, I would open the door to apartment and would stomp on them again. I did this every day not knowing if I would ever move out.

Two weeks later, I get a call from the agent to check out another apartment. When I saw it, I fell in love with it. It was spacious, clean, and bright.

Two weeks later, I finally moved and my calmness rewarded me. I became interested this state and I noticed that I seem to be able to carry it with me. During my stay in Japan, I learned about the Buddhist philosophies of letting go and detaching oneself from life terrors. I also found myself in sticky situations where I was vulnerable as a foreigner that did not have the mastery of the language. where I was vulnerable as a foreigner and somehow managed to get out of them because I remained calm.

I felt that things would work out regardless. I then came across colleagues and friends who were going through rough patches in their lives and I started coaching them. All I did was simply remind them of the tool of calmness that they already possess. When they were able to step back to see the whole picture of their problem, they were ready for the solutions that they simply offered themselves.

I will leave you with this quote from Gandhi: *“Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it is most important that you do it.”* I am a believer that everything happens for a reason. When you are confident in knowing that there is always hope and that there will always be a solution to every challenge, then you will enjoy your life and you will be able master to calm any inner storm.

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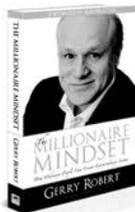
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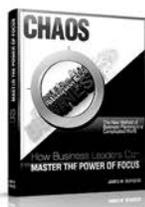


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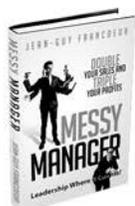
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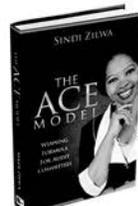
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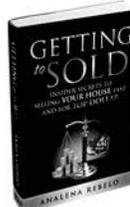
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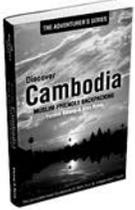
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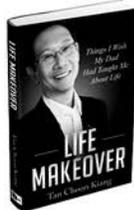
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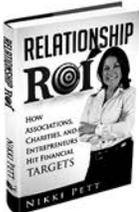
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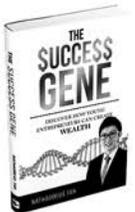
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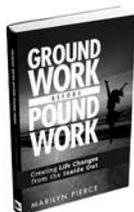
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