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Personal Financial Planning & Investment Management

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Why it is Important to Think About How You are Feeling?

What Can You Do to Feel Better Physically and Emotionally?

Please Take Good Care of Yourself!

Congress just approved the historic \$2 trillion economic stimulus package today, March 27, 2020. The President is expected to sign it quickly. The stock market has risen the past three days in anticipation of the passage of this bill and the financial assistance that will be received by our fellow citizens and businesses. (We do anticipate continued volatility in the financial markets until more facts are better known and understood. We will keep you informed about what we learn and how we can best support your near-term and long-term goals.) The focus of our newsletters is usually on the economy and financial markets. This newsletter, however, is different. Many of us are experiencing new challenges responding to the self-isolation or shelter-in-place directives. Below is helpful information about how to care for ourselves during these difficult circumstances.

One of my friends, Dr. Patrick Gannon, a Clinical Psychologist, sent me a paper he recently wrote about building resilience. Patrick gave me permission to share it with others. I think it is a very impressive summary of helpful information. I hope you agree. Please stay healthy & safe during the unprecedented experience we are all enduring!

Building Resilience in the Face Of COVID-19

By Patrick Gannon, PhD

We can all agree that the Coronavirus has altered our lives in many ways and probably more ways to come. This has caused significant stress that affects each of us in different ways. Many of us share common aspects of this stressful event—financial, emotional, psychological, family challenges and occupational issues to name just a few. Everyone has their own set of responses, reactions and feelings depending on the circumstances of their life situations.

Fortunately, there are things we can do that will help us cope with these reactions that may not be readily evident. Here are some tips, strategies and advice that may help you cope better with this crisis.

Psychologists have studied resilience for years and the results of these studies offer helpful guidelines. We are interested in resilience because it is a process that can be

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taught and learned rather than a personality trait that is more static over time. Resilience is what is needed now in the face of this unfolding pandemic.

Resilience is a process of adaptation to stressful events. Resilience is about learning how to **rebound** from adversity and emerge as a strengthened and more resourceful person. It may be hard to imagine that such a time as this could result in a stronger, more adaptive you, but research shows it is entirely possible to come out of this stronger.

The role of anxiety is important. Understand that the Coronavirus is a developing pandemic that brings with it a tremendous amount of uncertainty. The unknown can be daunting. We don't know how this pandemic will play out on a societal level, or how long we will have to take preventive measures or how our health care system will respond to the challenge of treating many thousands if not millions of sick people.

Uncertainty is rampant now and uncertainty causes anxiety. Many of us have anxiety—20% of the American population report having anxiety. The uncertainty tied to the pandemic is likely to trigger more anxiety and if you have any anxiety, your level of anxiety is likely to escalate that much more—unless you take active measures to manage it and push back. Letting yourself become hostage to your anxiety will not help.

Like professional athletes and performing artists who must step up and perform on demand, you too must take action to meet the challenges facing you now. One of the best things you can do is adopt a daily exercise routine. Cardio exercise is the best natural treatment for anxiety. Sports psychology now regards **exercise as medicine** because of all the ways it changes our physical and mood states for the better. Starting an exercise routine (if you haven't already done) so will also give you a sense of control, which can add to your self-confidence. If you maintain your exercise routine over time, the benefits will multiply and you will grow stronger in a physical and mental sense. Improved self-esteem will eventually follow.

Below is a summary of helpful suggestions drawn from several sources including the American Psychological Association's "The Road To Resilience" (2020).

1. Reach Out to Other People and Build Social Connections.

Accepting and giving help to others builds resilience through social connection. As humans, we are wired to feel safe being with people we trust. However, "sheltering in place" makes this more challenging because direct, face-to-face contact is now risky. So, we have to adapt. Fortunately, we now have video communications technologies like FaceTime, Skype and Zoom that can make reaching out and connecting with others safe. For some, the phone and email may be enough. Using these new technologies can be challenging. It may mean that you need to get some help to learn how to use them. Taking action by learning how to extend your social network using video chat is an adaptive response to the changing reality. You may not feel the need for social connection but once you do it, it will probably feel good.

2. Avoid Seeing Crises as Insurmountable Problems

Check out how you are thinking and feeling about this situation. How are your perceptions impacting your mood? Are they overly negative and fraught with anxiety? Perceptions can feel like objective truth but in reality, they are highly subjective and vulnerable to personal biases. In these times, it is easy to go negative and then have those perceptions morph into an even darker worldview. However, we can control how we interpret and respond to these events. We do have a choice here, but you must create some mental space for those perceptions to be checked for accuracy. Do they seem insurmountable? If so, accept for the time being that that is how you feel. But you can't stay in that place. At some point, you need to re-direct your attention from your fears to your need for safety. Shift your focus to what you can do to make yourself feel more secure.

3. Accept that Change is a part of Living

Covid-19 is here for now. It happened. And is still happening. Experts have told us for years that a pandemic was possible, if not likely. Turns out they were right. Now, our job is to accept that and move on from there. Don't fight the reality of the virus or fight how it is changing your life. We must move forward and adapt to the new reality. Life has always involved change—both good and bad. Think back to situations that were challenging in your past. How did you resolve them? What were the lessons gained from going through these crises? Apply the lessons going forward. You have learned to accept difficult things in the past and now we have to learn to accept this new challenge.

4. Move Toward Your Goals

The Coronavirus might cause us to shift some of our immediate goals. Ask yourself what your goals are now with this virus being part of the equation? Be realistic in adjusting your goals and tie them to specific actions. Make them part of your daily routine. Trying something new will give you a sense of control. You can change and adapt and move forward toward being the way you want to be. It may start with simple things like making your bed, putting your clothes away or making an important call. Those simple changes can beget other changes that lead to newer goals that set you on a course of change. Staying in a process of active engagement with life is a key element of resilience.

5. Take Decisive Actions

Act on adverse conditions as much as you can. Take decisive actions rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away. Find ways to adapt to the crisis and solve situational challenges that come up on a daily basis. By being creative, flexible and adopting a can-do approach to life,

facing the challenges is activating and mood enhancing. Roll the dice on trying new things. Don't hold back for fear they might not work. If your idea doesn't pan out, try something else. The benefits are in the process of engaging creatively in pursuit of solutions. And some of them will actually work!

6. Look For Opportunities for Self-Discovery

People often learn something about themselves when they engage in challenging situations. They may grow in some way when they change, adapt, adjust or achieve. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardships have reported positive benefits—better relationships, greater sense of strength, increased sense of self-worth or a heightened appreciation of life. If you build into your thinking that there may be an upside to engaging in new opportunities, you help facilitate that positive outcome. Remember that believing in yourself also builds resilience.

7. Nurture A Positive View of Yourself

We are all doing the best we can in these trying times. Accept that about yourself. Let that feeling of self-acceptance settle in and provide a safe emotional haven. Accept that you will continue to do your best. That's all that you can do in facing these challenging times. Identify your strengths based on past successes. What helped you overcome past challenges? Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience. Recognize them to yourself, recall them in moments of doubt and show determination in pushing forward.

8. Keep Things In Perspective

Even when facing stressful and painful events, try to consider the situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Times are hard right now but they can change for the better. Humans have an innate instinct for survival. We have to trust ourselves. We can use our ability to adapt and do the right things to survive. We must have faith that our leaders—at least some of them—will make the right choices to help us through the crisis. Don't let yourself get hijacked by your fears and anxieties. The relentless focus on the "what ifs" about the future can only make things worse. If you have the "what if" bug, the next step should be "then what?" Pivot from uncertainty to active planning.

9. Maintain a Hopeful Outlook

An optimistic outlook enables you to hope that some good will come of this crisis. Maybe humanity can pull together and accept that we are all in this together. Stay realistically optimistic that this difficult time will pass. A hopeful outlook is not a "Pollyanna" defense. This is not about denying the reality of the pandemic. Accept that this pandemic will be hard on us and will take our best to resolve it. But we must

balance the reality with hopefulness. We must not over-react or under-react. We must stay in the middle and be grounded in that space. From that place of balance, we can make our best effort. We need all of us to create a shared solution.

10. Take Care Of Yourself

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Try to “stay within yourself” as the athletes say to maintain a focus on your felt experience, moment to moment. Know how you are feeling and engage with your daily tasks from that place of open mindfulness. Engage in activities that you enjoy or find relaxing. No doubt, the pandemic will restrict your choices. Right now, there are no sports to watch, movies to view or performing arts to enjoy. The bars are closed and even some parks are closed. OK, that’s disappointing. But there are simple things still available to create moments to nourish you—go for a walk, read a good book, call a friend, listen to a podcast, work on a home project, listen to music, write, meditate, sing in the shower (or from the rooftops as the Italians are doing), cook and bake and so on. Reach out to others and have more compassion for yourself and others. Find new ways to take care of yourself and others each and every day. Remember, we are all in this together.

Patrick Gannon, PhD is a clinical and performance psychologist in San Francisco and San Rafael, CA His email is drpatrickgannon@gmail.com and his websites are PeakPerformance101.com and patrickgannonphd.com. Feel free to circulate this paper to your network.

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