

Stressful times, a call for action

For many of us everything is close to home at the moment. The world feels like it is in a state of high anxiety. Everyday stress is skyrocketing and freaking us out as a nation.

What are our commonalities as human beings right now? Our level of fear, dread, grief, heartache, panic, anguish, hopelessness, anxiety and the need to feel safe brings us together. We are told to think we need more security, more money, more success, to work harder, have a bigger house, to have a greener house, be a better parent, lose weight or be more organised. When what we really need is to care for ourselves better, to let our mind have a rest. Not everything has to be done today.

Human beings think on average 100,000 or more thoughts a day; many of them are repeats of thoughts of the day before. We need to create new neural pathways in our brain - those stimulated by gratitude, kindness, optimism, cheerfulness, buoyancy and hope. When we think more hopeful thoughts, our bodies release dopamine and serotonin, two types of neurotransmitters that relax the nervous system. Both of these chemicals are linked with happiness.

Stop constantly accessing the news or having it on as background noise; at least take it down a couple of notches. Being hammered with the same event over and over again is not healthy. Rolf Dobelli's recent book, *Stop Reading the News* is a manifesto of creating a happier, calmer and wiser life. Spending time in the outdoors, reading more, meditating, experiencing art and literature, these are the things that nurture our hearts and make us more peaceful and wise. How can we possibly benefit from seeing tragic events up close and personal duplicated on screens and social media?

Compassion is activated when we feel empathy for another person. Nationwide, we have opened our hearts to those affected by the bushfires. Many people don't know what to do with this open heartedness and they feel exposed and adrift. It's important to be able to care deeply for another, but not at the expense of caring for ourselves. It's a healthy option to support others from a base line of deeply supporting ourselves.

If you feel yourself falling into apprehension, when the fatigue of anxiety deepens, practical suggestions include, first recognising this state. Then calming yourself, stepping away from the area if things are getting too stressful. Bring yourself into the moment by noticing five things you can see around you, naming four things you can feel, three things you can hear, and identify two things you can smell. Finally, recall one good thing about yourself.

And be aware of your self-talk. It's often not what's happening that causes the problem, it's what we say to ourselves about the event, because our self-talk usually takes the problem up a rung, whereas being in the moment takes things down a rung.

Stop thinking about things that you are not prepared, or not able to do anything about. Turn off the television, have a break from your screens, re-runs of the day's events are not

necessarily in perspective and stepping them up is unhealthy and causes further angst and anxiety.

Create distinct internal boundaries of what you will and won't do. Being clear in your mind about your values and live and reflect these in your behaviour. The only viable state is to give from a position of strength rather than giving from burnout and fatigue. Think: 'What can I do right now that is going to have a positive effect on me and those around me?' It is sustainable to support and give to others based on having already supported and given to yourself. Self-sacrifice is not sustainable.

We're all going to have to evolve if we're to become the people who can navigate the turbulent waters of this age and steer our world into safer waters. Let's support each other in doing that. This is not a time for giving in, but for managing ourselves through the weariness by build personal strength and influence.

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