

7 Ways to Remain Positive and Productive in Times of Crisis

If someone had told you one year ago that you would spend the spring of 2020 being ordered to shelter in place, practice social distancing, and wear a mask in public, you probably would have questioned their sanity. Yet, here we are, facing a situation that many of us never deemed possible in our lifetime. The COVID 19 pandemic has impacted nearly every aspect of our lives. How we conduct business, communicate, travel, shop, exercise, and socialize have all been inevitably affected by the current crisis. Even as social distancing laws are slowly relaxed, millions of people are facing unprecedented levels of stress and uncertainty in the wake of the pandemic. However, even in this extremely challenging situation, we still possess the ability to make the most of our circumstances, and manage our mindset effectively. Here are 7 keys to staying positive and productive during times of crisis.

1. Practice Gratitude - It's no secret that we all are facing a host of problems at virtually any moment in our lives. However we also have a tremendous amount to be grateful for, even in challenging times. The daily practice of consciously focusing on what you have to be grateful for, not only frames your mind for positivity, but it also can help you to be more productive. A study performed at the University of Miami over 10 weeks found that participants who kept a daily gratitude journal were not only more optimistic, but they also exercised more regularly, made greater progress toward their goals, and reported less physical health issues than those that did not. The next time you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed take out a blank piece of paper and make a list of the things you are grateful for. If that process helps, make it a daily habit.

2. Focus on What You Can Control - Especially when bad news is abundant, it is very easy to become obsessed with issues that we have no control over. What will the economic recovery from this look like? Will it be U shaped, L shaped or W shaped? What if there is a resurgence of Coronavirus in the Fall or Winter and we have to go back into lockdown? What about the 30 million unemployed people? These are very real questions that are both legitimate and concerning. They also have one crucial thing in common. You and I have very little to no control over any of these things. Focusing obsessively on them, will very likely only cause more stress and damage in our lives. Instead, look for areas of life that we have full control over such as creating a positive daily routine, engaging in habits that boost physical health, effectively managing our finances, getting the most out of our time, and limiting our exposure to negative news sources.

3. Look for Opportunities - Fredrick Douglass famously said "If there is no

struggle, there is no progress.” While we know these words to be true, none of us particularly enjoy struggle, especially when it takes the extreme forms that it has recently. Still, there is opportunity to be had in virtually every situation. For example, beginning in late February 2020, we witnessed one of the greatest stock market crashes in history culminating on Monday March 16th where the Dow fell nearly 13% in a single day. This fall exceeded even the original Black Monday slide in October 1929 that signaled the beginning of the Great Depression. While millions of Americans helplessly watched 30% or more disappear from their portfolios, Investor Bill Ackman used that volatility to turn a \$27 Million investment into \$2.6 Billion in just a few weeks. Apparently while most people were panicking, and fearful, he was looking for opportunity, and found quite a bit of it! So we have to ask ourselves honestly, even with all of the negative affects from this crisis, what opportunities do I personally have? The answer to that question could be as simple as, getting outside and exercising, organizing the house, spending more time with our families, reading more, seeking online education, or becoming proficient at working from home. We tend to find whatever it is that we look for. If we look for problems, they will be there in abundance. However if we make the conscious choice to look for opportunities, we may be surprised just how many there are.

4. Build Healthy Exercise and Eating Habits - Jim Rohn put it well when he said, “Take care of your body. It’s the only place that you have to live.” While much of the content considered thus far has been geared toward mindset, our mental state is majorly affected by our physical health. For example it is well documented that when we exercise, our brain increases production of endorphins, dopamine, adrenaline, endocannabinoid, and myokine. What that means in English is that when we exercise, our body has increased levels of the chemicals associated with feeling happy, confident, capable, and less stressed. What we eat also impacts our mindset and productivity levels. In fact, according to Medical News Today these foods actually boost brain function and can increase productivity: Strawberries, Blueberries, Dark Chocolate, Fish, Whole Grains, Avocados, Kale, Eggs, Coffee, Broccoli. Admittedly, many of us don’t love exercising, and quite a few of the foods on that list may not appeal to you. However the good news is, you don’t have to become a raw vegan triathlete to start to see benefits in these areas. A simple 15-20 minute walk around the neighborhood after work can be the start to a productive exercise routine. Likewise, by substituting one or two healthy meals a week for what would have otherwise been fast food, we can begin to create positive results to both the body and mind.

5. Engage in Learning and Personal Growth - In a time when many of us are

concerned about the future of our jobs or businesses, we must remember that ultimately, we get paid for one thing: the VALUE that we create. If you can find a way to provide more value than anyone else to your organization, boss, or clients then you will have more job security than anyone else. The greatest way to provide more value is to simply become a more valuable person, which is directly correlated to learning and growth. According to Pew research, the average American reads 4 books per year, yet the average Fortune 500 CEO reads between 50-60. Apparently, they have an extreme focus on learning and growth, and it has resulted in these men and women running some of the largest companies in the world. We're not saying that if you want to grow you must read 60 books a year. However, we can honestly ask ourselves some reflective questions. When was the last time that I read a business or personal development book? Am I eager to seek out podcasts or trainings that can help increase my value? Could I use time that I'm already spending such as traveling to and from work or cleaning the house to listen to an audio book that may increase my value? Can I reach out to a mentor in my field to gain insight and advice on the skills that I need to grow? It does not take a tremendous amount of time or effort to engage in learning and personal growth. What it takes is some intention. When we do this it increases our value as individuals and contributes to a positive, focused, and productive mind.

6. Practice Mindfulness - Virtually every article, book, and training that has been published in the past decade on the topics of positivity or stress reduction has a mention of mindfulness. There is good reason for that as engaging in this has been equated to lower stress levels, healthier brain function, and decreases in depression and anxiety. Although we've heard this term many times, we might wonder, what exactly is mindfulness and how can we practice it? To put it simply, mindfulness is an awareness of the present. According to Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Donna Rockwell, when left to their own devices, our brains are constantly either "bemoaning the past or catastrophizing the future." Mindfulness is the act of directing our brain to focus on and fully experience the present without distractions or judgement. Though there are formal ways that you can do this, such as sitting silently for 5-10 minutes a day while directing your thoughts to your body and breathing, the practice of mindfulness can be even less complex than that. For example if you make a conscious effort to be more present and aware of simple daily activities, you are starting to engage in mindfulness. The next meal that you eat, instead of letting your mind wander, or staring at your phone while you eat, just focus on the food. Consciously enjoy the flavors as you eat, be in the moment. When you step outside in the morning, breathe in the outside air, feel the temperature, sunlight, wind or even rain, notice it consciously and without judgement. These are very easy ways to begin the practice of

mindfulness.

7. Show Kindness - The six previous areas that we have considered are really aimed at taking care of ourselves. Ultimately, though a completely self centered life does not lead to happiness, fulfillment, or positivity. Rather it often leads to the opposite. Of course self care is essential to a healthy mindset, but so is caring for others. Even in challenging times we can look for ways to help others. It could be taking an hour out of your day to run errands for a relative or neighbor who is sick. It could be donating your time or money to your favorite charity. Or it may be as simple as holding the door for a stranger, giving an above average tip to your server or delivery person, or just saying thank you with a genuine smile. These are very minor acts of kindness, yet they can have major effects upon the people who receive them. If that thought alone isn't enough, studies have found that people who practice giving typically have lower blood pressure, less depression, decreased stress levels, and even increased life span. So engaging in acts of kindness, benefits not only the receiver but also the giver. Whether you have a little or a lot to give, this is one of the best ways to create a positive and productive mindset.

So often we look at people who are extremely resilient when it comes to staying positive or productive, and we see it as some gift or natural ability that they have. While there can be a level of truth to that, the majority of our perspective comes from the choices that we make. Daily choices in regards to our habits, our focus, and our interactions with others all culminate to create our overall perspective and ultimately the kind of life that we have. So as you think about these 7 areas, are there perhaps one or two that you could make some adjustments in? By making a conscious decision to personally improve in these, you can remain positive and productive even in times of crisis.

Tyler Enslin
Professional Speaker
tyler@tylerenslin.com