



Developing Resilience in Difficult Times

So it seems we are going to be 'self-isolating' and 'social distancing' for a while and developing a new sense of 'normal' in the short term. And while it may not seem like it, there are opportunities in this awful situation if we are open to exploring them. This article is about the things you can do to adapt to this situation and to thrive.

There is no denying, this is a difficult time. We have no control over what is happening right now, but (and here's the biggie) we have every control over how we choose to respond to it. I'm going to say that again, you have all the control over how you choose to respond to this situation. In psychology and therapy we talk about this in terms of External Locus of Control (ELOC) and Internal Locus of Control (ILOC).

ELOC is where we have a perception that things happen 'to' us. That we have no control over what is happening, or how we respond to what is going on externally. This is a victim mindset and can lead to a lot of stress, anxiety and depression. When we are in ELOC it can be easy to become overwhelmed by situations like the current coronavirus outbreak and to sit back and give up.

ILOC is where we have the perception that, while we have no control over what happens around us, we have every control over how we choose to respond to it. This is a mindset whereby we take responsibility for our response to what is going on externally, and while on the surface it may seem like a small difference, it can make all the difference to how we think and feel.

At times when we feel anxious and uncertain it can be easy to slip into the ELOC way of thinking and start to worry increasingly about what might happen – we sit and play scenario's in our head focusing on all the things that could go wrong and as a result our anxiety levels increase. However, there are ways to avoid slipping into this victim mindset, by shifting our focus onto what we can control (ILOC) and doing that.

Staying physically and mentally healthy

Here are some things you could try:

- Look after yourself – try to eat healthy food and get regular exercise. It is easy to underestimate how interconnected our physical and mental health and well-being are, but looking after what you eat and exercising can massively improve our mood and capability to cope in difficult times. There are so many online exercise



programmes to do at home, as well as online Pilates, yoga and meditation classes and apps. Find one you like and schedule in regular sessions each day to keep you active.

- Look at things you can do to support your local or online community – aside from offering to pick up groceries and medication for at risk neighbours you could offer to speak on the phone to people who may be lonely, start a blog to share your experience and engage with others, do a joke-a-thon and get people laughing. Supporting the people around us gives us a sense of purpose and meaning and is incredibly satisfying. It is about connecting with something bigger than ourselves that keeps us going.
- Focus on what you can purposefully do next, rather than thinking too far ahead. Anxiety is the fear of an imagined negative future and can lead to a steep downward spiral. By focusing on the next positive, purposeful or productive thing we can do we avoid dwelling on a negative imagined future and look to what we can achieve, and the next thing we can achieve and so on. If you find yourself slipping into negative projections of the future, get up and do something positive – pick up the phone and check on a friend or relative, go for a walk around the block, play a game with your children, check in with a colleague, sing and dance your way around the house.

Working from home

If you are not used to working from home, or to working from home so much, it can actually be a daunting prospect. It can be easy to lose focus and purpose and feel disconnected and lacking motivation. Here are some things you can do to make your home working time more productive and satisfying:

- Get up, get ready and follow your usual going to work routine. Maintaining your usual routine will help you get into the right mindset for work from the get go. It can be tempting to linger in front of the television in your PJs, but this will ultimately make it harder to get going and focus on what it is you need to achieve.
- Write out what you want to achieve each day and by the end of each week. It doesn't need to have specific time slots (this can actually demotivate you when things don't go to plan) and then tick off when you achieve each item. Add even small tasks so that you get a sense of achievement from each action you take.
- Be tolerant of those people working at home with kids – yes, there may be disruption, noise and comedy moments playing out behind your colleague as you video conference, this is the current reality – embrace it!
- Arrange daily coffee breaks where you video conference with colleagues and just check in with each other. This ensure that you are all taking regular breaks and that you are staying connected.
- Have a start and finish time for work. It can be easy to end up working non-stop when there is no physical difference between your work space and home. Making



sure you put in place clear boundaries (as best you can with the kids bombing about, the cat taking up residence on your keyboard and the dog stealing your phone charger) so that you are switching off and mentally recharging.

- Introduce some small goals to set you up for success early in the day. By starting the day achieving some small tasks we set a positive intention for the day, whether these goals are personal or professional, they will help get you off on the right footing. By linking these actions to specific times and things you do every day you ensure success in establishing them as regular, positive habits. Here are some that I have incorporated into my day to get you started: A few exercises first thing – 10 press ups, 20 sit ups and 20 squats while the kettle boils; a few minutes reading something related to my profession while I drink my first cup of coffee; Checking in with family and friends when I take a break. The possibilities here are endless and some other useful habits to develop include writing 3 things you are grateful for each and every day – they need only be small things like the sun shining, a cuddle with your kids, the dog wagging his tail in pleasure at seeing you each morning. Focusing on the positives helps to positively prime the brain and puts in you a more creative and solution focussed mindset.

Ultimately, if you are struggling or need a little extra guidance in adapting to this current reality, reach out to someone – to a friend, a colleague, or to a therapist like myself. It is OK to struggle and looking after your mental health and well-being means asking for a little help when you need it. Find out more at www.origami-life.com

You can also 'like' the Origami-Life Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/ReshapeYourLife/>) where you can post questions and concerns relating to mental health, well-being, isolation, working from home and any other thoughts or ideas you have at this time in relation to mental well-being, resilience and productive working. Each day I will be posting answers to some of your questions in short videos providing tips on how to improve your resilience.