

FEAR FACTOR – WINNING THE MIND BATTLE.

The most valuable real estate in the world is where? Some of you might have guessed New York, London, Tokyo, etc. In reality, it's that area between your ears, your brains. How we think, problem-solve and respond has been the cornerstone of our progress. Now, more than ever we need to reclaim our minds to overcome the ultimate VUCA challenge (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) borne from the COVID-19 pandemic.



We as humans are wired to survive, but some of us will struggle more than others in these difficult times. This is not about being naively optimistic, but rather ensuring we adopt a realistic perspective, acknowledging both the positives and the negatives, and dealing with this new reality. Many organisations and people are going to have to start over. So how can we do this, without falling into full blown paralysis rooted in fear?

Currently contagion is happening on two fronts: 1) physically in terms of the COVID-19 virus and 2) mentally, with fake news and fear driven behaviour. In both cases we need to self-isolate. Mental contagion occurs because of mirror neurons in our brains. You can think of mirror neurons like a wireless network in our brains that allows us to empathize with others. The problem is the brain can't always tell the difference between a negative emotional state happening to us directly, and one happening outside of us. This happens with fear and panic, which we can catch from others. But in understanding this process, and then taking ownership of your responses you can break this cycle. First, we need to understand what underpins fear and then how to harness it.

Fear = anxiety + uncertainty

How can we master our anxiety?

1) Focus your efforts on your circle of influence not your circle of concern. Circle of influence is all those things you have direct control over e.g. your responses, your behaviours and attitudes. In doing so you empower yourself and move away from a victim mentality. Victor Frankl, the renowned Jewish psychiatrist who survived the atrocious Nazi concentration camps in World War 2 said: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

2) Reframe your experience of the situation. Most of us know about PTSD, but few know about Post Traumatic Growth (PTG). PTG is a positive psychological change that occurs as the result of one's struggle with a highly challenging, stressful and traumatic event.

Ask yourself these questions as you navigate PTG times:

- Unpack the ways in which you have found a different perspective on life with new opportunities?
- Identify the things you did to survive what happened that showed you strengths within yourself that you didn't know you had?
- Name what you are most grateful for, what you have and for those around you?
- Describe the ways in which your relationships with family and friends have been strengthened and deepened in intimacy?

Whilst the above questions are retrospective in nature, you can also live intentionally into them in the present, as you navigate this challenging time.

3) Practice mindfulness, be in the moment by engaging your 5 senses each day. This simple but powerful exercise promotes clarity of thought, calmness, valuing the present and new perspectives. Bonus is that just 10 mins a day adds real benefits.

How can we deal with uncertainty?

There are many unknowns facing us. Some clarity may appear in the following weeks and months. We need to stay comfortable with this ambiguity whilst carving out certainty in areas where we have more control. Two strategies come to mind:

1. Trifecta alignment. Do you have a clear understanding of your:
 - Purpose: a succinct, inspiring one-liner to give direction to your life's quest.
 - Code: how you will play the game of life on your terms.
 - Goals: bringing to life your Purpose and Code in a tangible manner.

**If you are interested in these three areas contact me (I have some useful tools that will help create clarity for you, if you are prepared to invest the time and energy).*

2. Progress principle. Each day we need to feel like we are moving forward, not just treading water. Ask yourself these questions:
 - What are my key goals?
 - How much progress have I made on these key goals?
 - How did I ensure I stayed motivated?
 - How have I created meaning/impact in my work?
 - How have I built strong team relationships?
 - What one small thing can I do tomorrow that will make me more likely to succeed in future?

By understanding fear and proactively adopting some key behaviours, we can master these turbulent times. Let's beat this pandemic.