

Thriving in Tough Times

7 Ways to Live Your Best Life



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FORWARD

Our culture emphasizes happiness.

Consumers are bombarded with advertising images of happy people. Marriages often end when partners decide they are not happy. Business professionals sometimes work 80-hour weeks, neglect their loved ones or go broke because they believe money will make them happy.

So where is all this happiness that everyone is seeking? Is it attainable? Happiness is out there, but it cannot be bought or sold. It must be developed, and resilience—your ability to cope with and bounce back from adversity—is the key.

Studies have shown that happy people tend to be more resilient during difficult circumstances. And these are difficult times. If you are distraught over the current global economic crisis, recovering from a personal tragedy or suffering from clinical depression, you may be questioning your ability to move beyond your circumstances.

How can you become more resilient?

This e-book cannot make you happy. What it can do is empower you with knowledge so that you can become more resilient and provide you with...

SEVEN KEY THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW TO SURVIVE TOUGH TIMES.



CHAPTER 1

Taking care of yourself will give your body the physical support it needs to help you cope.

When faced with life's challenges, taking care of yourself may be the last thing on your mind. You may be caring for a loved one or trying to put your life back in order after a traumatic event. You may feel that others need your time and attention more. Or you may not be motivated to get out of bed.

Whatever the crisis, do not neglect your body. Not only will your body suffer, your state of mind will be compromised as well. Resiliency starts with your health. And you cannot begin to bounce back if you lack the physical energy and strength to get through the day. Start your comeback today by paying attention to what you eat, taking dietary supplements, scheduling regular check-ups, exercising regularly, and getting plenty of sleep.

Pay attention to what you eat. Start by incorporating more fresh foods into your diet. You may be surprised to learn that many additives, preservatives and fillers contain ingredients that sap your energy. High intake of sodium, carbohydrates, saturated fat and calories are associated with increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and stroke. Selecting fresher, healthier foods can increase your energy and cut your risk for adverse health problems.

Take dietary supplements. Not everyone finds it easy to stick to a healthy diet. You may be deficient in certain vitamins or minerals and need supplemental nutrition. There are many choices on the store shelf that can meet your needs. From protein shakes to fiber bars to gram specific doses of individual vitamins and minerals, there seems to be a product for nearly everything. Be sure to check with your doctor or health care provider if you are on prescription medications that may interact with your supplements.

Schedule regular check-ups. Heart disease and diabetes can negatively impact your mood as well as your health. Detecting medical conditions is the first step in successful treatment, which could make you feel better sooner and dramatically enhance your quality of life. If it has been years since your last trip to the doctor, learning about that state of your health could not only help put to rest your worries, it could save your life.



Exercise regularly. Whether you train for a marathon, take up yoga or simply make a commitment to walk the dogs more frequently, moving is good for your body and your state of mind. Increased activity has many benefits, including more energy, elevated mood, healthier weight and decreased risk of various medical conditions.

Get plenty of sleep. In the evening, when the rest of the world is winding down, you may view this time as an opportunity to catch up on work, watch television or surf the internet. You shouldn't underestimate the importance of rest. Your body needs it to recharge. Healing processes that repair cell damage and reset your internal clock take place at night while you slumber. If insomnia keeps you from getting adequate rest, consider an over-the-counter sleep aid and make a concerted effort to change your schedule. Robbing your body of sleep means you start off your day with an energy deficit. Over time, lack of sleep can affect your overall health.

Taking care of yourself through balanced nutrition, proper medical care, regular exercise and adequate sleep will support a healthier immune system. And a healthier body is less susceptible to illness and more prepared to help you cope with stress and anxiety.

Things you can do now to improve your health:

- Pay attention to what you eat.
- Take dietary supplements.
- Schedule regular check-ups.
- Exercise regularly
- Get plenty of sleep.

CHAPTER 2

Nourishing your soul can allow you to tap into your spiritual strength.

If a healthy body enables you to endure tough times, it stands to reason that a healthy soul will provide you with spiritual strength. Much like your body, your soul—the embodiment of your life force—needs nourishment.

You can tap into your spiritual strength by discovering and acknowledging your spiritual needs, connecting with your inner joy, engaging in meditation or prayer, communing with a higher power, reaching out to others and then maintaining your spiritual strength by nourishing your soul regularly.

Discover your soul. Perhaps you are not one for internal reflection. Maybe you are out of practice or feel that spiritual support is unimportant. Are you hurting on the inside? Do you yearn for a deeper personal understanding? Whatever you wish to call it, this is the essence of who you are, your heart and mind. Your soul. Honor and acknowledge it.

Connect with your inner joy. It may be as simple as making a list of people you love or taking a walk in nature. Reflecting on things that touch you deeply or make you feel at one with humanity can help awaken a sense of peace and understanding that can help you through adversity.

Engage in meditation or prayer. Your soul is a part of you. It has always been there. You do not have to be a Yoga master to tap into your spirituality. Find a quiet place and let your thoughts reveal themselves. Practice breathing and relaxation techniques. Learn to silence the white noise caused by the anxiety in your mind. Listen to your inner voice. Be open to receive the guidance you need to make it through these difficult times.

Commune with a higher power. Dealing with difficult times may be easier if you are relying on a higher power. If you are a devout churchgoer, you have likely reached out to fellow worshipers or said a prayer for spiritual support. Connecting to a higher power is one of many ways to tap into your spiritual strength.

Reach out to others. Whether at church or in a Yoga class, communing with fellow soul-searchers allows you to tap into the spiritual experiences of others and share your own. Uplifting others through prayer and meditation can be a powerful experience that makes you feel at one with the world around you.



This renewed outlook may even help put your own situation in perspective.

Soul searching could reveal needs you never knew you had. You may feel unequipped to fulfill them. Don't hesitate to reach out to a spiritual leader, pastor, priest or Rabbi for guidance. Ask them for recommendations to help you further your spiritual development and education.

Feed your soul regularly. People often pray or seek spiritual support during hard times. Strengthen your soul and build up a spiritual reserve by continuing to nourish your soul even after the difficulties in your life have passed. This will help you maintain a healthy balance with your mind, body and spirit.

Things you can do now to nourish your soul:

- Discover your soul.
- Connect with your inner joy.
- Engage in meditation or prayer
- Commune with a higher power.
- Reach out to others.
- Feed your soul regularly.

CHAPTER 3

Asking for assistance may connect you to helpful resources and relationships.

Despite the proliferation of email, social networks and internet forums, people are more disconnected now than ever. Studies blame this lack of personal interaction with everything from increased depression and anxiety to our youth's widespread inability to read social cues. Personal relationships and social interactions are vital for a healthy, balanced life. To create the kind of support system you need, ask family and friends for help, forgive and move on, get family counseling, join a support group, seek professional help, and cultivate a relationship with your healthcare providers.

Ask family and friends for help. Your family and friends are your life line to support. Some play bigger roles than others. Some are just passing through during specific parts of our lives and move on while others become steadfast companions for life. Sharing your experiences with family and friends can provide you with a wealth of love and help you cope with life's ups and downs.

Forgive and move on. If you disengaged from an unhealthy friendship or had a relationship-ending disagreement with a cherished loved one, forgive them and let it go. Freeing yourself of this painful burden will allow you to move forward in your life. Focus instead on the healthy relationships you have in your life today.

Unresolved conflicts in a marriage or family can prevent past wounds from healing. As painful as it may be, seek closure even if you are the only one who moves on. Do not let the burdens of another hold you in a destructive pattern of behavior. You can stop the cycle.

Get family counseling. Not every family is ideal. And not every person can simply forgive and let go of the past. You or someone you love needs help to heal your family unit. A professional family counselor may be able to bring your family back together and show you ways to engage in healthier, happier, more productive relationships.



Join a support group. When dealing with tough times, you may find the friendship and support you need in a cause-specific support group. Not everyone can relate to what you are going through. Sharing your situation with others who are experiencing the same difficulties can be an uplifting experience. Contact your local health care provider, search online or ask a trusted friend for a recommendation.

Seek professional help for mental disorders. If you are depressed, debilitated by anxiety or suffering from a mental illness, you need professional help. Family members, friends or support group leaders are not qualified to help you cope in this situation. And neither are you. If you need of psychiatric or psychological counseling, consulting a professional may be the best thing you could do for yourself and the people who love you.

While under your doctor's care, adhere to the treatment plan you have been given. Show up for counseling sessions. Participate in group meetings. Take any prescribed medications and follow the dosage and frequency exactly. Resist the urge to self medicate or change your dosage when your condition has improved. Your improvement is likely due in part to the medication you are receiving. If you stop taking it without consulting your doctor, you may relapse or have an adverse reaction.

Cultivate a relationship with health care providers. If you have a chronic illness, there are ways you can help your health care providers to help you. Keep a record of your symptoms in a diary. Record how these affect your daily life. Keep information regarding your condition in a file for quick reference. And try new treatments. Staying organized, informed and open to new therapies could provide you with much needed relief. And the healthier you are, the better equipped you are to deal with trying times.

Things you could do now to create a support system:

- Ask family and friends for help.
- Forgive and move on.
- Get family counseling.
- Join a support group.
- Seek professional help.
- Cultivate a relationship with care providers.

CHAPTER 4

Reassessing your priorities could free you from unnecessary demands.

Figuring out what is important to you is an integral part of time management. When facing adversity, assessing your needs may sound like a luxury. However, mismanagement of time contributes significantly to daily stress and lessens your ability to take care of and deal with stress. And the accumulative cycle of stress can wear you down and affect your health. Fortunately, you have the power to change this by listing your daily activities, prioritizing your list, creating reminders, setting boundaries, accepting reality and letting go of guilt.

List your daily activities. Keep a time journal for one week. Take it with you everywhere and record every activity you engage in that lasts one half hour or longer. From volunteer work in the community to how much time you spend watching television, you may be surprised to learn exactly how you spend your day. Does your list mirror the priorities you thought you were upholding? If not, you need to make some changes.

Prioritize your list. Begin by identifying the most important daily practices you engage in. Then, rank them in order from most important to least important. Next, move to the less necessary tasks. Prioritize and whittle them down. Remove activities that do not contribute to your well-being. Next, ask yourself what is missing. How do you want to spend your time? If your friends or family have been squeezed out of your top priorities, write them in now. Also, where are you on this list? If you are neglecting yourself, you will see if reflected in the way you spend your time. Be sure to make time for yourself.

Create reminders. Put your priorities into practice by making to-do lists, posting reminders and performing mental “reality checks” throughout the day. It takes time to create new habits, so be patient with yourself. If you are already going through a hard time, be especially kind to yourself as you reorient your life to reflect your new outlook.

Set boundaries. Let your priorities be the guide. If others struggle with your newfound sense of purpose, gently explain that things have changed and suggest other ways that you can be available without compromising your priorities. Again, be patient with yourself and others as you all become more accustomed to these boundaries.



Old habits die hard. That doesn't just apply to you; it applies to the people in your life who have benefited from your time and attention. If they cannot accept and respect your new boundaries, you need to be prepared to firmly assert the authority you have over your life and the way you spend your time. If you lose relationships due to the positive changes you are making, it may be a necessary step to regaining control over your priorities.

Accept reality. You might be tempted to adopt an over-zealous schedule in order to get to the reward of time management as quickly as possible. However, you will not achieve balance with short cuts. Take small steps and set goals. And if it becomes clear that something is not working, review your priorities and make changes. Your priorities should reflect who you are, not dictate who you should be.

Let go of the guilt. If the changes you are making are a result of your priorities, they are important because you have made them important. You should not feel guilty. And you should not allow others to sabotage your efforts simply because they have different plans for your time. This is your life. These are your decisions. Change is hard! It is much easier to do what comes naturally and gravitate to the familiar. But, if what you were doing before was making you happy, you wouldn't be reading this book. So...stick to your guns!

Things you can do now to reassess and reprioritize:

- List your daily activities.
- Prioritize your list.
- Create reminders.
- Set boundaries.
- Accept reality.
- Let go of guilt.

CHAPTER 5

Finding humor in adversity can alleviate stress.

Laughter has health benefits that scientists are only now beginning to understand. According to recent research, laughter can increase antibodies, decrease stress hormones and activate important components of immune system.

But what if you don't feel like laughing? How can you harness these benefits while going through such a difficult time? One step at a time: practice smiling, learn to laugh at yourself, adopt the perspective of an observer, spend time with children, develop your sense of humor, and laugh even when you don't feel like it.

Practice smiling. Since "fake" smiles affect skin temperature, brain activity, respiration and heart rate in the same beneficial ways as real smiles, you can reap the benefits...and you don't even have to mean it. The more you practice smiling, the more likely you are to genuinely feel it coming from the inside. So, next time you catch a glimpse of yourself in the bathroom mirror, stop, make eye contact with your reflection and smile.

Learn to laugh at yourself. If you tend to be self-critical, this may not come easily to you. Self-consciousness and sensitivity create tension and anxiety, which make it harder to relax enough to laugh. Instead of worrying about what others are thinking of you, turn your focus outward. Laughter can help you accept your flaws and forgive yourself.

Adopt the perspective of an observer. Perhaps you are so steeped in your own negative emotions that you cannot see the humor in your situation. So, rewrite your story. Rather than letting the sadness or drama consume you, switch genres and think of your set of circumstances as a dramatic comedy. It may help to ask yourself what kind of light-hearted advice you might offer to a loved one in the same situation.

Spend time with children. In addition to being funny, innocent and full of life, children are natural laugh factories. Hanging out with kids may reconnect you with your inner child, make you laugh and give you an excuse to play. Seeing the world through the eyes of a child may also give you a renewed perspective during times of difficulty.



Develop your sense of humor. You may have noticed that the things that amused you when you were younger or happier do not amuse you now. You haven't lost your sense of humor; perhaps it has merely changed. Seek out new kinds of comedic relief by surfing the internet, reading the funny page in the Sunday paper, watching comedies or hanging out with friends who make you laugh.

Laugh anyway. Forced laughter can have the same psychological and physiological effects as practicing your smile. You don't have to have a special reason to laugh. Polite laughter at botched jokes, nervous laughter and chuckling to oneself during an awkward situation are evidence that laughter isn't always the result of comedy. Sometimes, laughter can provide a release of tension and ease an otherwise difficult situation.

Things you can do now to find humor in adversity:

- Practice smiling.
- Learn to laugh at yourself.
- Adopt the perspective of an observer.
- Spend time with children.
- Develop your sense of humor.
- Laugh anyway.

CHAPTER 6

Focusing on the positive could enhance your mood and give you a better perspective.

When it seems that nothing is going right, seeing the world in positive terms may feel impossible. Negative self-talk, toxic relationships, depression, personal tragedy and other circumstances can weaken the resolve of even the most positive person. It may be difficult to pull yourself out of this rut, but you can do it by engaging in positive self-talk, counting your blessings, considering the possibilities, keeping a journal, seeking inspirational enrichment, and surrounding yourself with positive relationships.

Engage in positive self-talk. Are you hard on yourself? Do you have a negative internal dialogue that plays over and over like a scratched CD. Turn it around by saying nice things to yourself. Start by asking someone you value and trust to tell you what they like about you. Then, make a list of your assets. You might assume that your circumstances are a reflection of your self-worth. Nothing could be further from the truth. By making a list of your strengths, abilities, accomplishments and talents, you can reframe the way you view your weaknesses to mirror your assets.

Count your blessings. Instead of focusing on the things you'd like to change about your life, think about the things you wouldn't change. You may be surprised at how much you have been taking for granted. Make a list and post it in a conspicuous place so that you can see it daily. Live every day with a graciousness that acknowledges how fortunate you feel to have these things as a part of your life.

Consider the possibilities. Adopt a more hopeful outlook on the future by focusing on the positive opportunities that lie ahead. Resist the urge to back away from the unfamiliar. You may miss out on something wonderful.

By choosing to view your future with cynicism, you are choosing to continue being a victim of your circumstance. By choosing to be a victim, you are surrendering your power to others. Do not be a victim. Empower yourself by envisioning a better times ahead.



Keep a journal of positive affirmations. Fill it with your favorite memories, proudest moments, encouraging quotes, and anything else that connects you with the positive. Keep adding to it as you find inspiration, and review it when you need a reminder of just how fortunate and worthy you are.

Seek out inspirational education. Motivational tapes and inspirational books are excellent resources for information. Once you find a speaker or author you enjoy, seek out their other materials, attend their seminars, or join fan groups or book clubs devoted to your positive role models. Adopt these principles and use them in your life to keep you on a positive track.

Surround yourself with positive relationships. The people who come and go in your life have a lasting impact on how you see yourself and perceive the world around you. If those people are upbeat and uplifting, your outlook may be brighter. However, if your relationships are dysfunctional, unfulfilling or abusive, they will be a barrier to your happiness. Remove or restrict your exposure to toxic people and replace these relationships with people who reflect your values and priorities.

Don't forget to thank the people who have had such a positive influence on your life. Bless them and yourself by looking for opportunities to appropriately support them in their times of need. You are an important part of their lives. Make sure they know what an important role they play in your own.

Things you can do now to focus on the positive:

- Engage in positive self-talk.
- Count your blessings.
- Consider the possibilities.
- Keep a journal of positive affirmations.
- Seek out inspirational education.
- Surround yourself with positive relationships.

CHAPTER 7

Rediscovering your sense of wonder will expose you to new experiences and ideas.

When bad things happen, people often go into survival mode. They pare down their activities to only the most essential outings, neglect relationships with family and friends, and cut themselves off from the rest of the world. The result can be a self-focused, isolated existence that is unfulfilling, discouraging, exhausting and repetitive.

Does this sound like you? There are new people, experiences and opportunities all around you. Hard times may be obscuring your view. You can remove this obstacle. By tuning into and recognizing the wonder in the world, you will become aware of joy, indulge your passions, embrace change, and live courageously.

Become aware of joy. View life with awe-filled respect. Take counting your blessings one step further by appreciating the beauty and meaningfulness of life outside of yourself. Commune with nature. See your loved ones as cherished human beings and the admirable qualities. Acknowledge the depth of love you feel for your significant other and your family. Wonder at the complexity of the universe and your place in it.

Indulge your passions. During difficult times, you may have given up on pursuing your interests or hobbies. Reengage your passions, whether creative or intellectual, solitary or collaborative. Reward your renewed spirit with a sense of purpose. Explore new avenues of expression by expanding on existing skills or talents. The result could be a career change, continued education, a business prospect or a myriad of other opportunities. Challenge yourself in productive ways that engage your body, mind and spirit.

Embrace change. Open yourself up to the journey of life and accept the fact that things will not go the way you anticipated. Rather than viewing these detours as failures, see them as sign posts for future opportunities and experiences. Perhaps the road will lead to places that are even better than the route you had planned. Flexibility in the face of these challenges will help you recognize the possibilities.



Live courageously. When set-backs occur and life disappoints you, hold on to your ideals. Do not lose sight of that which is most important to you. Live like your life matters by acknowledging the importance of your choices and their consequences, then hold on tight. Not everyone will agree with your decisions, but don't let undue influence sway you from your goals and priorities.

Become truly present. All you truly have is today. This moment. Right now. Don't plan your life away or look over your shoulder with regret. Focusing solely on the past will keep you from moving forward toward your goals. Focusing only on the future will rob you of the ability to recognize the joy and opportunities happening in the present. If you focus on what you can change about your life and your circumstances happening right now, you have effectively changed the future.

Things you can do right now to rekindle your sense of wonder:

- Become aware of joy.
- Indulge your passions.
- Embrace change.
- Live courageously.
- Become truly present.

IN CONCLUSION...

By understanding the seven things you need to know to survive tough times, you have the knowledge and the power to become a resilient, positive, productive, happy person.

Take care of your body. If your physical needs are not being met, you cannot begin to address the rest of the equation: your mind and your soul. Pay attention to what you eat. Take dietary supplements. Schedule regular check-ups. Exercise regularly. Get plenty of sleep.

Nourish your soul. Honor your life's essence by acknowledging your spiritual existence and tapping into your spiritual strength. Discover your soul. Connect with your inner joy. Engage in meditation or prayer. Commune with a higher power. Reach out to others. Feed your soul regularly.

Ask for help when you need it. Reach out to family and friends and healthcare professionals. If you do not have an adequate support system, create one. Ask family and friends for help. Forgive and move on. Get family counseling. Join a support group. Seek professional help. Cultivate a relationship with care providers.



Reassess your priorities. Make sure that your values are reflected in the way that you spend your time. Restructure your time around the things that meant the most to you. List your daily activities. Prioritize your list. Create reminders. Set boundaries. Accept reality. Let go of guilt.

Find the humor in adversity. Reap the psychological, physiological, and social benefits of laughter by incorporating a little levity into your life during hard times. Practice smiling. Learn to laugh at yourself. Adopt the perspective of an observer. Spend time with children. Develop your sense of humor. Laugh anyway.

Focus on the positive. Realize the effect that a negative outlook can have on your health and well-being and make changes to cultivate a kinder, gentler, more positive lifestyle. Engage in positive self-talk. Count your blessings. Consider the possibilities. Keep a journal of positive affirmations. Seek out inspirational education. Surround yourself with positive relationships.

Rediscover your joy. Don't settle for happiness or contentment if you can reach beyond yourself and tap into the wonder of the world around you. Become aware of joy. Indulge your passions. Embrace change. Live courageously. Become truly present.

Recognize that you have the tools and the ability to move through life's tough times. Take the time to make changes for yourself. You ultimately have the power to create the life you want.

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Dan offers decades of relevant experience and expertise to clients who are in the midst of a life changing transition and/or existential dilemma. His approach entails creating a safe, open, engaging relational space then to identify and build upon the clients strengths so that they can fully realize their potentials and capacities.

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