

BOING! Retreat

28th June 2020

Talk 2: Resilience: Surviving a PTE

We are going to look now at the two remaining general categories that we talked about this morning: Engagement and Meaning. Certainly some of these skills can be supported directly with meditation. For example, you can use the Feel Good technique to help to develop a sense of self-efficacy, or you can use some Focus In techniques to learn emotional regulation. We are going to talk more about what Focus In techniques are, and will be learning one later this afternoon.

However, some of these skills are more directly addressed with practical action, and that's where I want to start this afternoon.

Having an internal locus of control: this means that you feel like you have some control over your conditions, that you are adaptable, and don't succumb to a fatalistic view that there is nothing you can do to improve the situation. An attitude of self-efficacy will result in your being able to take action, however small, to effect some change in your life. You may not be able to prevent the Potentially Traumatic Experience or to stop it, but you are able to do small things to care for yourself and to work toward a solution. One of the best ways to develop a sense of being able to achieve something is to actually achieve something, and then recognize what you've done. This builds momentum so that you can continue to act, with more and more confidence.

When you are in the midst of a challenging situation, though, it can be hard to remember that you *can* act, or to know what to do. One way I got around this when I was

really struggling with depression on a regular basis was to create a list that I could see every day, asking myself if I was doing things like eating well, exercising, talking to friends, and so on. There are some things which can be generally said to be important and effectual things to do in the middle of a potentially traumatic experience, and it's worth having this list near at hand to help you remember (we'll be working on such a list soon). These are three things that are widely recommended in the midst of an adverse situation: take care of your basic physical and emotional needs; connect with others; and help others, either through your own social circle, or by volunteering for an organization you feel aligned with. These may seem like common sense, but when you are in the midst of turmoil, common sense isn't always that common.

Let's think about these activities. Say you are in the middle of a challenging situation: perhaps you are concerned about a loved one who is ill with COVID-19, or has a chronic debilitating condition, or you've lost your job. What are some things you'd want to remember to do to *take care of your body*?

- eat a healthy diet
- exercise
- get enough sleep
- avoid escapes such as alcohol or drugs
- take time for small pleasures
- ???

What about caring for your emotional needs?

- Schedule time for pleasurable activities (reading, hiking, etc)

- Limit access to news or disturbing TV shows
- ???

Connection is essential. Remember Emmy Warner's 32-year project following the children of Kauai? One of the two key features of at-risk children who became well functioning adults was that they had a strong bond with a non-parent support figure. This is important in building resilience, and it is essential for surviving during challenging experiences. So above all, don't isolate. If you do not have supportive people immediately present in your daily life, make intentional connections with people who will keep an eye on you. Agree with a friend or two to check in daily, or attend regular interest groups or social activities. Volunteer. Choose carefully which of your friends you will spend time with. Make sure you spend your social time with people who care about you and will support you, not those who don't listen to you or who focus on the negative as insurmountable. Does anyone have any other ideas to add to the *Connection* list?

All of these things will help you feel more in control of your life. These guidelines will help shift the locus of control from outside situations to your inner self. It can also help to see positive results of ways you have helped others.

Finally, in the midst of difficulty, it will be a source of strength and guidance if we determine to live by our values. Perhaps this should have been the first thing we talked about, but it is a big subject and we are only going to scrape the surface of it right now.

We are going to be doing a journaling exercise now. For some, this might be just the beginning of your own deeper exploration. For others, this may be simply reviewing or restating what is already established in your lives. I won't be asking anyone to share what you write, so please be honest with yourself. We will take a total of around 45 minutes for

this exercise. We'll start with 20 minutes thinking about what our personal values are. What is important to you? What influence your decision making? I'll put up a list of values – there are certainly many more – to help get your brain moving. Brainstorm with yourself, writing down what comes to mind as important values to you, and then honing the list down to a few key values. (How many “a few” are is up to you: 3, 5, 15...) We'll do that for about 20 minutes, and then I'll switch the slide to some practical questions that you can use to create a plan – your own reminder list – for implementing the skills for surviving a Potentially Traumatic Experience. These will include the things we've just talked about – physical and mental care, connection, and so forth. When we switch to this part of the exercise, use the key values you have identified to help to create your action plan.

On the next page you will find a list of values to help you get started. Take about 20 minutes creating your own set of values.

Accountability	Friendship	Peace
Achievement	Fun	Perseverance
Adaptability	Future generations	Personal fulfillment
Adventure	Generosity	Power
Altruism	Giving back	Pride
Ambition	Grace	Recognition
Authenticity	Gratitude	Reliability
Balance	Growth	Resourcefulness
Beauty	Harmony	Respect
Being the best	Health	Responsibility
Belonging	Home	Risk -taking
Career	Honesty	Safety
Caring	Hope	Security
Collaboration	Humility	Self-discipline
Commitment	Humor	Self-expression
Community	Inclusion	Self-respect
Compassion	Independence	Serenity
Competence	Initiative	Service
Confidence	Integrity	Simplicity
Connection	Intuition	Spirituality
Contentment	Job security	Sportsmanship
Contribution	Joy	Stewardship
Cooperation	Justice	Success
Courage	Kindness	Teamwork
Creativity	Knowledge	Thrift
Curiosity	Leadership	Time
Dignity	Learning	Tradition
Diversity	Legacy	Travel
Efficiency	Leisure	Trust
Environment	Love	Truth
Equality	Loyalty	Understanding
Ethics	Making a difference	Uniqueness
Excellence	Nature	Usefulness
Fairness	Openness	Vision
Faith	Optimism	Vulnerability
Family	Order	Wealth
Financial stability	Parenting	Well-being
Forgiveness	Patience	Wholeheartedness
Freedom	Patriotism	Wisdom

Now spend about 20 minutes reflecting on these questions, and any others that come to mind. Create your own list of things to do in the midst of challenge. Consider posting the list in a place you can see frequently, in case you can't remember what to do.

- How will I care for my physical body?
- How will I support emotional and mental health?
- With whom will I connect? When and how?
- How will I help others?
- What have I already achieved, however small, that I can acknowledge?
- What is one, small, doable goal that I am willing to set?