



You Take Charge – The Eye of the Storm

Chronic pain is a complex problem with many variables affecting final perception of it and how intrusive it is on your life. Each human being is incredibly unique. So, you have a situation that is characterized by complexity superimposed on even more complexity. No one knows the details of your life like you do and certainly no one can comprehend the specifics of your mind and how you process different types and levels of adversity. Regardless, no matter how much time a medical provider spends with you, it is not possible for him or her to solve your chronic pain. By definition, the **only possible person that can heal you is you**. Conversely, once you understand a given problem and the overall solution from your perspective, healing can consistently happen.

Any time your sense of well-being or peace of mind is dependent on external factors, you are at the mercy of those circumstances. For instance, if you feel the need for approval from your boss or peers, then you have given them a lot of power if they withhold their approval; consciously or unconsciously, they often do.



Hurricane Gustav

One evening while watching the news, I came up with a metaphor that has helped me understand how I could better relate to my life stresses and remain in a peaceful state of mind.

There was a news story following the progress of Hurricane Gustav as it approached New Orleans. The eye of a hurricane is quiet and the winds are the strongest at the periphery. As I watched the satellite and radar pictures a metaphor evolved. The whirling wind represented my racing thoughts. As I become further away from my “center” the greater the impact these thoughts have on the quality of my day. Historically I would attempt to slow down or suppress these thoughts. I wasted a lot of energy and as I became drained, the thoughts would race even faster when they resurfaced.

The wind can also represent your environment. Most of us spend a lot of time trying to control our circumstances to allay our anxiety and be happier. Many, if not most, of our situations in life are beyond our control. The key with both racing thoughts and our life circumstances is to pull into the center of the storm. You cannot stop a hurricane. It has also hit me how futile “stress management” is because the stresses that are the most toxic are the ones that you can’t control.



“Happy”

We are conditioned by our society to believe that the more we experience or possess, the happier we will be. This includes having less pain. At some deep level, we all know that this is not completely true, but we still hold onto the myth. The issue is that that we do have a choice in how we respond to our adversity. If we choose to remain in an angry reactive state of mind, then the energy you need to solve your problem is quickly drained. It is critical to remain connected to who you are regardless of your circumstances and then move forward with conviction on YOUR terms, not the terms of those around you. If you are anxious and angry, you are not connected to anything.

The other problem with “happy” is that it becomes ongoing expectation that creates frustration when you are not in that state. BTW, how are you defining “happy?” Happy is a label that detracts from being fully aware of what is in front of you. It is even more problematic when you try to maintain this state of being when your reality is unhappy.

It isn't the stress

Stress is not a problem. It is your neurochemical reaction to it. When your body is appropriately reacting to a threat, you are on alert and the opposite of being relaxed. Unfortunately, mental threats for humans create the same chemical response as a physical threat but we can't escape our thoughts. Being in the center of the storm means that in spite of the threats, you are able to regulate your body's chemistry in order have a neutral or calm profile. How do you accomplish this state of being?

Awareness

The starting point for solve any problem is awareness of:

- The nature of chronic pain
- Your diagnosis and situation
- The principles behind the solutions
- The tools that work the best for you calm down and return to the center
- When you are pulled into the wind (triggered)

Although all of these layers of awareness are important and linked, the last one is the most critical. You must first become aware that you have been swept into the storm, before you can pull yourself into the center. In other words, you have to become aware of when you are unaware.

The outcome

Internalizing the concepts and perfecting the tools is a lifetime journey that continues to get easier with time and repetition. What about unpleasant circumstances that you have no control over? You might notice that this is the case most of the time. You can't control the people around you, although we often try. When you attempt to control a situation that is not controllable, you are wasting your time and energy. Dr. Fred Luskin, author of *Forgive for Good*, calls this scenario, "the unenforceable rules". It is fine to wish someone would act better, but that wish turns into a demand, you have now increased your stress response without any hope of resolving it.

It is also clear that the actual level of stress is a major problem if it involves not having your basic needs of food, shelter, and water being met. I don't want to disrespect this degree of adversity.

While your thoughts spin in your head and life races around you, use your own set of tools to remain fully aware, centered, and in control of your life and care. Paradoxically, you will have much more energy and creativity to deal with your adversities and move on to the life you want. Then, you will be at peace – and free!

