

Repeat to Yourself, "Life Isn't an Emergency"

In some ways, this strategy epitomizes the essential message. Although most people believe otherwise, the truth is, life isn't an emergency.

I've had hundreds of clients over the years who have all but neglected their families as well as their own dreams because of their propensity to believe that life is an emergency. They justify their neurotic behavior by believing that if they don't work eighty hours a week, they won't get everything done. Sometimes I remind them that when they die, their "in basket" won't be empty!

A client who is a homemaker and mother of three children recently said to me, "I just can't get the house cleaned up the way I like it before everyone leaves in the morning." She was so upset over her inability to be perfect that her doctor had prescribed her anti-anxiety medicine. She was acting (and feeling) like there was a gun pointed at her head and the sniper was demanding that every dish be put away and every towel folded – or else! Again, the silent assumption was, this is an emergency! The truth was, no one other than she had created the pressure she was experiencing.

I've never met anyone (myself included) who hasn't turned little things into great big emergencies. We take our own goals so seriously that we forget to have fun along the way, and we forget to cut ourselves some slack. We take simple preferences and turn them into conditions for our own happiness. Or, we beat ourselves up if we can't meet self-created deadlines. The first step in becoming a more peaceful person is to have the humility to admit that, in most cases, you're creating your own emergencies. Life will usually go on if things don't go according to plan. It's helpful to keep reminding yourself and repeating the sentence, "Life isn't an emergency."



Consider:

- Stress cannot be avoided
- Stress can be effectively managed

Listen to Your Feelings (They Are Trying to Tell You Something)

You have at your disposal a foolproof guidance system to navigate you through life. This system, which consists solely of your own feelings, lets you know whether you are off track and headed toward unhappiness and conflict –or on track headed toward peace of mind. Your feelings act as a barometer, letting you know what your internal weather is like.

When you're not caught up in your thinking, taking things too seriously, your feelings will be generally positive. They will be affirming that you are using your thinking to your advantage. No mental adjustment needs to be made.

When your experience of life is other than pleasant – when you're feeling angry, resentful, depressed, stressed out, frustrated, and so forth, your warning system of feelings kicks in like a red flag to remind you that you are off track, that it's time to ease up on your thinking, you've lost perspective. Mental adjustment does need to be made. You can think of your negative feelings in the same way you think of the warning lights on the dashboard of your car. When flashing, they let you know that it's time to ease up.

Contrary to popular belief, negative feelings don't need to be studied and analyzed. When you analyze your negative feelings, you'll usually end up with more of them to contend with.

The next time you're feeling bad, rather than getting stuck in "analysis paralysis," wondering why you feel the way you do, see if instead you can use your feelings to guide you back in the direction toward serenity. Don't pretend that the negative feelings don't exist, but try to recognize that the reason you're feeling sad, angry, stressed, or whatever is that you are taking life too seriously – you are "sweating the small stuff." Instead of rolling up your sleeves and fighting life, back off, take a few deep breaths, and relax. Remember, life isn't an emergency unless you make it so.

*From Don't Sweat the Small Stuff and it's all small stuff
By Richard Carlson, Ph.D. 1997*



This is My Family

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