

Tip Sheet: Success During Uncertain Times

By Faith Monson

Most of us try our best to reduce stress. There's nothing wrong with that—except for the fact that the universe seems to be able to dish out a fresh batch of stress every time we clear our plates.

Uncertainty creates stress. When we feel uncertain, we don't know which way to go. We're caught between two perceived negatives with no clear positive. We doubt our own ability. Uncertainty can turn a neutral situation into a stress-provoking monster. The uncertainty may be due to the economy, a personal situation that is unfolding, the weather or the business cycle. Uncertainty makes us fearful and often paralyzes us.

But the truth is, stress is part of living. How we view stressful situations has as much to do with the negative feelings we experience as the situation itself. Have you ever noticed how some people seem to thrive during stressful situations? In my experience, the ability to feel energized instead of paralyzed in a stressful situation is due to three attitudes: empowerment, creativity, and a commitment to action.

Here are my ten tips for success under stressful and uncertain situations.

1. Create your team. No one succeeds alone. Take a look at top athletes—they're surrounded by coaches, trainers and other experts who help them maximize their game. Maybe you can't pay for a team just yet. That's OK—create a team from three or four colleagues, friends, family members or like-minded professionals and promise to support each other with encouragement and ideas.
2. Reduce uncertainty through preparation. The more information you have, the more empowered you feel. When you understand what you're up against, you can make better choices and realize better outcomes.
3. Practice. Whether you practice your presentation alone or role play with a friend or coach, practicing boosts confidence and helps you anticipate tough questions so that you can answer them well.
4. Think of creative ways to deflect negative responses. Stress often comes in the form of negative comments from other people. Learn to reduce your stress by anticipating their negativity and finding a way to reframe their comment toward a positive outcome.
5. Determine your desired outcome in advance. You reduce uncertainty when you know what you want. Go into a stressful situation with a clear mental picture of how you want it to turn out. Even if you have to make adjustments, you'll have a yardstick to measure what you're offered against a clear idea of what you wanted.
6. Create a BATNA (Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement) Negotiators know that they don't always get their first choice. Skilled negotiators go into a negotiation with a very clear picture of their desired outcome—and an equally clear idea of what the minimum is that they'll settle for. Make up your mind in

advance what elements are must-haves and what are nice-to-haves and know at what point you're willing to walk away.

7. Go in with a commitment to move forward. We feel the most stress right before we make an important decision. After we've made the decision, we feel a sense of relief. Go into a stressful situation committed to find some way to continue moving forward. Just making that commitment will help to decrease your stress.
8. Cultivate a positive outlook. We often lose the battle in our mind before we ever lose it in real life. Catch yourself whenever you begin to imagine failure. "They won't buy. They can't afford it. My company isn't as big as the competition." If you've already decided the project will fail, no one will argue with you. Think positively!
9. Refuse to take "no" for an answer. According to Robert Allen and Mark Victor Hansen in their book, "The One Minute Millionaire," the difference between success and failure is getting past the third "no." When you refuse to let "no" stop you, you gain the power of determination.
10. Realize that small failures often come before large successes. Every successful person failed somewhere along the way. The secret to success is trying again, and again, and again. Stressful situations become less stressful when you realize that failures and disappointments are just speed bumps on the way to success.

Put these tips to work for you and watch your stress decrease, even during uncertain times. Once you cultivate empowerment, creativity and commitment to action, stressful situations will lose their power to derail you, and you'll be on your way to success.

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