

THRIVING

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FROM MEG KAUFMAN, MFT
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Hoping is Not a Hopeless Endeavor

Having a healthy dose of hope can be motivating and inspiring. It keeps people focused on what's ahead instead of what's in the past. It can also help keep the focus on possibilities, and reframe obstacles as opportunities.

For some, however, being hopeful goes hand-in-hand with feeling naïve or foolish when things don't work out as planned. They would rather not have hope at all if it means later disappointment.

But for others, having hope doesn't mean living in denial of life's difficulties; it simply reminds them there are better times ahead.

The Benefits of Hope

Research indicates that it's more beneficial to have hope than not. Hopeful people tend to show more resilience when faced with difficulties. They have healthier lifestyle habits and, on the whole, are more successful, personally and professionally.

According to the Mayo Clinic, having a hopeful, positive attitude has health benefits as well. These include:

- Increased life span
- Reduced depression
- Lowered levels of distress
- Increased resistance to the common cold
- Greater emotional and psychological well-being
- Decreased risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Improved coping skills during difficulties/stress

In addition, people with hope typically have meaningful long- and short-term goals, along with a flexible plan to achieve those goals and the reinforcement of positive self-talk.

We humans are sometimes too inventive for our own good—we can envision a future course of action along with every potential catastrophe that could occur along the way.

Being aware of everything that can go wrong often makes doing nothing—in an attempt to avoid failure or pain—seem like a viable option.

Cultivating hope, on the other hand, helps activate creativity and inventiveness and prompts us to solve the predicaments we face by taking action in spite of our fears.

Hope brings with it the belief that things can get better. Regardless of how dire things may seem, there is potential for a positive outcome.

Is It Possible to Be Too Hopeful?

It could be said that optimists have a healthy dose of hope while “extreme optimists,” suffer from blinding hope. They want nothing to do with bad news.

Researchers at Duke University found that extreme optimists (you could call them “high-hoppers”) don't save money, don't pay off credit cards and don't make long-term plans, but they are more likely to remarry if divorced.

Moderation, as usual, is the key. The researchers also found that “moderate optimists” tend to work harder and work longer hours, earn and save more money—and pay off their credit cards.

Being a moderate high-hoper doesn't mean keeping your head in the sand when it comes to life's occasional unpleasant circumstances. It just means keeping a positive attitude—believing the best will happen, not the worst.

That helps ensure that when difficult situations do arise, you're looking for a way to make the best of it.

Studies seem to suggest that being hopeful is a skill that can be learned. So whether you're an extreme optimist, an extreme pessimist or somewhere in between, there is hope for us all. *

10 Ways to Take Charge of Your Life

Too often we take care of other people's needs, shunning activities that have the most meaning for us. Here are 10 ways to take back your life.

- 1. Create goals.** Get clear on what you really want, write it down and start to take action toward your goals.
- 2. Commit to your own agenda.** As much as possible, before helping others each day, complete the tasks that move you toward your goals.
- 3. Set boundaries.** When you heed your own agenda, you will likely need to set boundaries with the people in your life.
- 4. Say no when you want to.** Respecting your true desires is liberating.
- 5. Do something you've always wanted to do.** Fulfilling long-held wishes brings joy and empowerment.
- 6. Seek balance.** Which of these aspects need attention: social/family, spiritual/creative, career or health?
- 7. Eat well and exercise.** Take charge of your energy by treating your body well.
- 8. Clear clutter.** Creating an orderly and beautiful physical environment positively affects our sense of internal order and makes space for the new.
- 9. Pursue completion.** Avoiding unfinished tasks, things that remain unsaid and relationships that need closure, hijacks our thoughts and saps our energy.
- 10. Get support/find allies.** Get help processing uncomfortable feelings and seek friendships with people who appreciate and support your taking charge of your life. *

A Letter From Meg Kaufman, MFT



Having a hopeful, positive attitude has many benefits, including increased resistance to colds and greater emotional well-being. As the article on page 1 explores, hope, in moderation, can confer a kind of resilience to the inevitable disappointments of life. While it is possible to be too hopeful, all in all “hoping” is a skill worth developing.

Hope is just one of many feelings we may experience. In fact, fluctuations in mood are perfectly normal and healthy. However, when moods swing between extreme, persistent and disruptive highs (mania) and lows (depression), Bipolar Disorder may be the culprit. The page 3 article examines the symptoms of Bipolar Disorder, how those symptoms can be triggered—and managed—and how to get help.

On page 4 we meet Heather, a baker, who has learned how to speak her truth with skill. When you speak honestly about your dissatisfaction, you do run the risk of alienating others. However, as Heather discovered, with a little skill and consciousness, it is possible to speak up and be heard.

Also in this issue, the quiz asks how well you let go of the past and move on, and the Top 10 explores ways to take charge of your life.

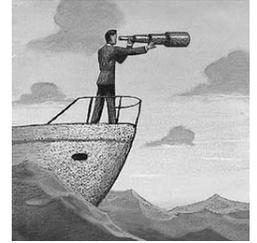
If you have questions about the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

May this season bring you improved communication and greater well-being.

How Well Do You Let Go and Move On?

Whether you're letting go of a cherished idea or person or a vision of how life was supposed to be, it can feel excruciating to leave something or someone behind. It can feel as though you're losing a part of yourself. Sometimes you might even feel attached to your anger and resentment.

However, letting go can be an empowering act, as it forces you to develop important resources like courage, compassion, forgiveness and love. Answer the following true/false questions to discover how well you release what's no longer viable:



True False

Set 1

- 1. I have a hard time letting go of grudges. When someone does me wrong, they are permanently on my “bad” list.
- 2. I somehow feel it's “noble” to never give up, and this has caused me to stay in unhealthy relationships or situations.
- 3. When an intimate relationship ends, it can take me years to get over it.
- 4. I spend a lot of time living in the past—sometimes reliving old glory days, sometimes replaying what I wish I'd done differently.
- 5. When I make a mistake, I can't stop dwelling on it and kicking myself.
- 6. I feel paralyzed by my fear of the unknown. I can't let go of what I have when I don't know what will replace it.

Set 2

- 1. When negative emotions arise, I allow myself to fully experience all my feelings, and I quickly find myself in a better emotional state.
- 2. Leaving behind a situation that isn't working for me is the most self-caring thing I can do.
- 3. Finding a way to forgive someone—and sometimes myself—allows me to release anger and blame.
- 4. When I'm in conflict with someone, sharing my feelings allows me to feel heard, release my negative feelings and return to a place of peace and connection.
- 5. Although keeping the status quo may feel safer, I am committed to making choices that help me get out of my comfort zone and grow.
- 6. When dealing with the grieving process around the death of a loved one or the end of a relationship, ultimately finding a way to accept what IS, even though still sad, brings me greater peace.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may want some support to help you let go and move on. Please don't hesitate to call. *

Life on a Swing: Bipolar Disorder

We all experience a variety of moods, including happiness, sadness, anger and frustration. Having “good” moods, “bad” moods and fluctuations in moods is an inevitable part of life.

But when a person experiences extreme emotional highs (mania) followed by extreme lows (depression) and these fluctuations severely and negatively impact how they behave and function in their daily lives, a mood disorder could be the underlying cause.

Bipolar disorder (aka manic depression) is an illness that causes severe changes in mood, energy, thinking and behavior. It’s characterized by extreme mood swings, recurring episodes of depression, and one or more episodes of mania.

Mania may feel like happiness, but it is not the same thing. Happiness ebbs and flows, while mania is an extreme, prolonged euphoric state that remains high until it crashes. It impairs judgment, negatively interferes with one’s ability to function in daily life and makes one more impulsive and reckless.

During a manic episode, people typically experience three or more of the following over the period of a week or more:

- Anger, irritability or aggressiveness
- Feeling unusually optimistic
- Requiring little sleep but feeling extremely energetic
- Increased, loud or rapid talking
- Racing thoughts
- Grandiose belief about one’s ability
- Being much more active than usual
- Extremely distractible (unable to focus)
- Acting on impulse without regard for consequences

Bipolar disorder has no single cause, but both external and psychological factors are believed to affect the disorder and act as “triggers.” The following triggers can initiate episodes and/or exacerbate symptoms:

Stress. Sudden, drastic changes can trigger manic episodes—weddings, getting fired, divorce or moving.

Substance Abuse. Drugs like cocaine or ecstasy can trigger mania, while alcohol or tranquilizers can trigger depression.

Medication. Certain cold medications, caffeine, corticosteroids or antidepressant drugs can trigger mania.

Seasonal Changes. Episodes of mania and depression typically follow a seasonal pattern. Manic

episodes occur more frequently during the summer, while depressive episodes tend to appear during the fall, winter and spring.

Lack of Sleep. Even missing a few hours can bring on an episode of mania.

What to Do If You or Someone You Love Has Bipolar Disorder

If you recognize the symptoms in yourself or someone you love, don’t wait to get help. Living with Bipolar Disorder affects everything from relationships and employment to physical health. Diagnosing and treating the disease as early as possible can help a person live a more productive, happy life. In addition:

Get educated. Learn all you can about the disorder. Knowing the symptoms and available treatment options can assist in recovery.

Get Treatment. While currently there is no “cure,” the right treatment program, including medication, can help manage symptoms and greatly improve quality of life. Compliance with treatment and medication—even if feeling better—is the key to long-term stability.

Get Therapy. Through therapy you can learn to cope with the disease and change thought patterns.

Lower Stress. Avoid high-stress situations, do something fun, relax, maintain a healthy work-life balance, and incorporate meditation, yoga or deep breathing into your life.

Seek support. Talking to a trusted, supportive person or attending a support group can help you discover coping tips and reminds you that you’re not alone.

Make healthy lifestyle choices. Getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, reducing or eliminating caffeine, sugar and alcohol, and exercising regularly helps to stabilize moods.

Monitor your moods. Keeping track of how you’re feeling on a chart or in a journal can help you spot patterns and minimize or even prevent problems before they start.

Structure. Setting regular times for eating, sleeping, exercising, working, socializing and relaxing helps to stabilize mood swings.

Although Bipolar Disorder is a chronic mental illness requiring long-term treatment from a doctor and/or therapist, many strategies can be used to help you stay on track.

In the throes of a bipolar episode it’s easy to feel as though the illness runs one’s life, but it doesn’t have to. Armed with a solid support system and coping skills, it’s possible to live a full and productive life. *



Speaking Your Truth

“There’s only one thing harder than speaking your truth and that’s not speaking it.” — Naomi Wolf

Heather, a baker for a catering company, began having issues with one of her co-workers after he bulldozed over her experience and capability in the kitchen. After her resentment had built up to a nearly unmanageable level, she called for a meeting, during which she explained to him how she was feeling.

“I made sure to speak my truth,” says Heather. “By that I mean that I spoke with him in a completely honest way about my discomfort, without trying to minimize or play down the fact that I felt disrespected. I used “I” statements, but was also clear about why the work environment had become unbearable.”

Although the lead up to the talk was terrifying—Heather cried in her car on the way to work and nearly turned around—since the meeting, things have been much better at work. The caterer was able to listen to Heather’s statements without attacking her and, on the

whole, her work environment has become significantly more pleasant.

Heather’s experience is perfectly normal, especially in regards to the fear she felt before expressing her dissatisfaction. Most people have a difficult time saying what’s true for them when issues come up in family and work life.

They fear the pain of being rejected, writes Mike Robbins in *Be Yourself: Everyone Else Is Already Taken*, so they alter their words and actions and may even manipulate situations and people to get what they want without having to speak honestly.

However, speaking your truth is not only mentally liberating, it’s beneficial to your physical health. “When we let our true self be seen, when we let our inner pilot light radiate, we heal,” says Rankin, the author of the upcoming book *Mind Over Medicine: Scientific Proof You Can Heal Yourself*. Holding in emotions and resentments can lead to stress,



which can be taxing on the body. Releasing stressful tension is just one of the benefits of speaking truthfully.

But how does one actually do this without alienating others?

1. Aim for being real, not right.

Speak from the heart, and focus on expressing your thoughts without attacking the other person.

2. Get to know your own truth through introspective exercises. Think about what you value, what inspires you, what makes you feel grounded, what gives you purpose in life.

3. Practice. Speaking your truth becomes easier with time and repetition. Always pay attention to that inner pilot light. And when something seems off in your outer world, don’t be afraid to let your voice be heard.

As difficult as it may feel to start speaking up, ultimately it’s easier to be truthful than it is to evade the issue. It takes courage to speak up, to risk another’s displeasure, but in the end the physical and mental rewards of doing so are endless. *

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