



It's been a tough year, and you are stronger for it

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Many, many years ago, after experiencing a really difficult two years, someone told me some wisdom that made me feel a lot better. The message was that we should not regret the difficult times, but rather embrace them, because hard times prepare you for a great future. When you are hurting and miserable this is not so easy to get. Most of us want a fairly straightforward and peaceful life. I know I do. However, looking back, every significant improvement in the quality of my life, whether it be relationships, health, financial, career, was achieved after some horrible experiences. And those horrible experiences paved the way for things to get better.

At some level we know this. If you read any spiritual book – and I am talking about covering a huge variety of the various spiritual domains, you will realise that anyone who did something significant started out facing big challenges. We have statements such as “nothing good comes easy” that have been passed down through the ages. And even if you read children’s books and fairy tales, you will see that the heroes have it tough at first. So, at some level, although we wish we did not have to go through the hard times, and we might be quite bitter and resentful about them, we do understand they can bring us benefits.

Now I am not saying that everything that happens to you is good. There are people who believe this. They believe everything happens for a reason and we are better off because of it. I don’t agree with this. Losing a child or being raped is never a good thing. There is such a thing as toxic positivity. Some things in this world are truly awful and should not happen. Where you have suffered losses and terrible heartache, you need to feel the pain and grieve. And take your time about this if you need to. But that does not mean that tough years like the past two mean you have to permanently be bitter and upset and resentful about life.

When you look back on the past year, or past two years, you may feel like you never want another year like these. You may be thinking about all the things you lost, all the goals you could not go for because of Covid and the consequences of the pandemic. And you may feel very sad or angry or despondent. Or many other emotions too. And it is normal to do this. Unfortunately our brain is wired to look at losses and pain rather than benefits and gain. As human beings, however, we can reframe most of what we think about. Not reframe it in a ridiculously positive way, but consider another side. With almost everything that happens to us we can choose the way we want to interpret it. And I want you to consider that, although this may not have been a happy time for you, it has made you a greater person.

Below are some questions to get you thinking about how the past two years have in fact, made you grow.

1. What skills have you gained in the past two years, skills that you may not have gained if life had carried on as normal without Covid? You may have had to learn a lot about working remotely and the use of virtual working platforms such as Teams and Zoom. You most probably became a lot more computer literate in certain areas. You may have learned new skills because you had to change your job or change your business. Maybe your business was hard hit by Covid and you needed to start a new one.
2. What strengths that you have come to the fore and helped you get through the last two years? You probably realised you are more resilient than you thought. Perhaps you realised you are more creative than you thought you were.
3. Have you developed new coping skills? Did you start an exercise routine to help you cope with the anxiety and uncertainty? Maybe you started practicing mindfulness to keep yourself in the present and stop worrying about a future that has not arrived yet.
4. Have your values changed? Values reflect what is most important to us. In times of crisis we can find our values changing as we start to think about what really matters to us.
5. What did you learn about yourself that enabled you to deal with the pandemic? Perhaps you found out that you have more courage than you ever thought possible. Maybe you realised that the way you are living your life is not making you happy or fulfilled.
6. What realisations did you come to? You could have decided that family was more important to you than you realised. Perhaps you realised you actually hate your job. You may have realised you can cope with events that you would never have thought you could have coped with.
7. How has what you have learned from the pandemic experience enabled you to be much better prepared for the future? You may be more flexible in your thinking about your career. You may be better able to think on your feet and start something new quickly if you need to. You may have realised you were getting stuck in a rut in your life and as a result becoming less able to deal with future changes.



The past two years will have challenged us and stretched us in ways we could not have imagined. You know, and you can do so much more now. This means you are better prepared for whatever the future might send your way. You know yourself better: your strengths and weaknesses. You have developed new coping skills. You are most likely more creative and innovative and able to make change faster and better. And you could very well be far more aware of what really matters to you in life and how you want to spend the rest of your years on earth.

When you look back on the past year (s) don't only think about the loss and the pain you have suffered. Appreciate how far you have come. You have been through a lot. You have overcome a lot. Give yourself credit for what you have endured and prepare yourself to step forward again into a new year, all the better for your experiences.