



Master where you are

1 July 2021

South Africa is now in a strict lockdown due to the surge in Coronavirus cases. Even if your life is not majorly impacted by the lockdown restrictions, you will be affected in some way. The images, news, and talk around the virus is exhausting, depressing, and scary. Videos, such as that of the restaurant worker bursting into tears on hearing he will lose his job are heart-breaking, except perhaps to the most hard-hearted of all. Whether you are smack bang in the middle of the chaos because you have the virus, loved ones have the virus, you have lost your job or had to close your business, or whether you are really only affected by not being allowed to attend gatherings and buy booze, no one is escaping this. We are all impacted.

This is the reality we are living in now. And life requires that we deal with this reality. You may have had to put some of your goals on hold and that is okay. You can come back to them later. Right now, your job is to get through this. And the best way to get through this pandemic and the ensuing consequences, is to master where you are.

So how do you do that? Most of us have not lived through times like this and there is no roadmap of how to make the best of the current times. Most of us are having to learn what it is like to deal with a pandemic of this nature and come out the other side. There are some tools you can use to help you deal with what is happening now.

Learn how to self-soothe.

Many people do not know how to self-soothe and how to take care of themselves. In times of difficult and traumatic change you need this skill. When things are difficult, when people are mean and cruel to us, when life is tough, we need to self-soothe. You cannot always rely on someone else to be there, especially when you are an adult. And it is not appropriate to take your bad days out on others. That is immature and unfair to the people around you. The skill of learning to self-soothe is very important because life is such that we are going to have days, weeks, and perhaps even months when we feel truly awful. It is at these times that we need to know how to comfort ourselves and make ourselves feel better.

To start with, create a safe place just for you. A place where no one can interrupt you. A place where you do not have to put on a brave face for anyone. A place where you can express emotions as you need to. Go to this safe place when you need to rant, to cry, or are just generally falling apart. Make this a nice place. Make it warm and inviting. Fill it with things you love. You can also use this space as a place of comfort. Think about what you find comforting. Is it having a hot drink? Is it climbing under the blankets and reading your favourite book? Is it engaging in some pampering activity? Perhaps it is lazing away in a hot bubble bath with a drink and a book by your favourite author. Think about ways in which you can soothe yourself when you are highly upset. Then when you need some comforting you can engage in some of these.

Ask for help

Ask for help and make use of as many resources as you can to help you survive. The worst thing you can do when times are difficult is isolate yourself. Certainly, you want to stay away from people who are mean and spiteful, but you need the support and help from others. The love and care of other people cannot be replaced with anything else when you are in a bad way. Never be afraid to ask for help if you are battling. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength. It means you don't want to give up. However, be selective in whom you choose to ask for help. You want to ask people who are supportive, who care about you, and who are able to help you.

Remember also that people out there have varied experiences. Some people will definitely have resources to help and assist you. Some people will know what advice to give you. You are not alone, no matter how much you may feel like it. Humankind collectively has vast stores of knowledge and wisdom, which we need to draw on during catastrophic times like these.

Keep changes to a minimum

Don't make too many other changes in your life. The current times are exhausting. We are all overwhelmed. It is not a good time to make a whole lot of changes in your life if those changes can wait for another time. There is such a thing as overload. When we are overwhelmed we do not think things through clearly and carefully, and we can end up making the wrong decisions. Decisions which we regret later. Unless you absolutely have to engage in making certain changes, keep your life the same as it was before, as much as possible.

Re-invent and re-imagine

Although we don't like it, changes of this magnitude offer us the chance to rethink our lives. For the most part, we don't like making changes. Especially not big changes in our lives. When life throws us a change of the magnitude of this pandemic, we are thrown out of our comfort zones. We realise things cannot be as they were before. And so we are forced to think about and make changes in our lives. This can be a good thing.

Maybe, looking back to your life pre-pandemic, everything in your life was not perfect. Think about what you may want to change in your life. Re-envision your life going forward. What do you want life to be like in the future for you? Who do you want in your life? Have your values changed because of your experiences with the

pandemic? How do you get to live your life and fulfil your new values? When our backs are to the wall and our lives have been thrown upside down, we get to really think about who we are and what we want from life. We also get to rethink our purpose and the contribution we want to make to the world.

Know it will end

Everything changes. Good times come to an end. So do bad times. So as much as it may feel like this is never going to end, it will. Please remember this. Too many people feel the only way out of such bleak times is to end their life. To them, all they can see is the ongoing struggle of everyday. However, nothing stays the same. Know that this too will end. There are better days ahead for you.

This further hard lockdown is difficult, frustrating, and disappointing for many people who wanted to get on with their lives. Just when people were hoping things could start going back to some semblance of normal living, there is a setback. Setbacks and difficult times are times to be good to ourselves and take extra care of ourselves. When things are tough the worst thing you can do is be hard on yourself. That just makes the tough times even tougher and makes getting through the days, weeks, and months even more difficult.

Wishing you everything of the best for this July, and keep going, one step at a time. We will make it out of this eventually.