

## **Staying in the Eye of the Storm**

### **Adversity**

Almost every patient of mine who is in chronic pain is also experiencing much adversity in the rest of his or her life. The stories I hear each day are mind-boggling. They include abuse, murder, family suicides, extreme financial struggles, homelessness...the list goes on and on. The anger I hear expressed about these troubles is more than legitimate.

The point I always make to my patients is that the energy being drained by your anger is what is needed to solve your problems.

The more legitimate your anger, the harder it is to detach from it. It will destroy you if you don't. So you still *need* to truly let it go. Chronic pain, of course, is a very legitimate cause for anger. Don't let it consume you.

### **True Freedom**

It is critical that you learn this life lesson quickly: separate your life circumstances from your happiness. When your peace of mind is independent of your external circumstances, then you are free. Period. End of story. Here is one of my personal learning experiences:

### **Starting Out with a Zeal**

I started my Seattle practice in 1986. I thought I had it made and had all the tools needed to help people out with spine surgery. I quickly found out that it wasn't that easy. I was working long hours. Most patients did well after surgery but many did not and were upset with me. There are complications associated with spine surgery and some were severe. All of this took a toll.

### **Two Years into My Practice**

I remember sitting at my desk late one night in 1988 ruminating about my problems. I had a patient with a massive wound infection; another 300-pound post-op patient was belligerent and fighting with the hospital security guard; I was having a hard time financially meeting the office overhead; a malpractice suit had been placed on my desk earlier in the day. I remember thinking, "I can do this. I'm really tough. Bring it on."

Six months later, I began to experience anxiety. I was not familiar with this emotion. By 1990 I was having panic attacks and feeling fatigued most of the time. None of this was anticipated even as a possibility. It was incredible to me that I had worked so hard to become a surgeon and I had no capacity to enjoy it. Of course, that made me even more frustrated.

### **"I Quit"**

I made a decision to quit being a spine surgeon. Nothing about my lifestyle seemed to make any sense. I did not understand the anxiety and I didn't know why it was occurring with such intensity. Somehow in the midst of all of this, I instinctively knew that bailing out of spine surgery was not going to solve the anxiety problem.

### **"I Am Not Quitting"**

I decided that I was going to commit to remaining a spine surgeon. If I made a career change, it would be on my terms—not because I was on the run from anxiety. It was the correct choice but a close call in that I almost did not make it through. However, I was correct that the anxiety was a separate issue. One that was going to follow me regardless of what I did. It wasn't until 2003 that I finally broke through and was able to escape the pit of anxiety and frustration.

### **“The Eye of the Storm”**

I wrote a post, [“The Eye of the Storm.”](#) The gist of it is that the center of a hurricane is very still and quiet. The winds represent racing thoughts and/or life circumstances. Most of us are programmed to think that if we had the perfect set of circumstances, we would be happier. Or if we could control our thoughts, we would be more at peace. This just isn't true. You must learn to be happy regardless of your circumstances.

### **Controlling a Hurricane**

You cannot stop a hurricane. When you try to control your thoughts, they just spin faster. Many, if not most, of your life circumstances are out of your control. Yet people spend a huge amount of energy trying to slow down their thoughts or change their situation to achieve happiness.

What are the odds that you will have every variable in your life so perfect that you will be at peace?

### **Moving to the Center of the Storm**

The goal of the neurological reprogramming tools is to pull you into the center of the storm and **stay there**. Then you'll have the mental clarity and emotional energy to solve and deal with situations as they arise. It does not matter if the problem is in your career, friendships, family, accomplishments, body image, or project work. Your peace of mind will be independent of all of them. But you cannot do it through positive thinking or “mind over matter.” You must use the reprogramming strategies that work for you.

### **Adversity as an Opportunity**

You will eventually be able to view each life-hurdle as an opportunity to practice what you have learned. Your energy levels will go through the roof and you'll be able to create whatever life you like on your own terms.

You cannot run from anxiety. It will follow you everywhere. You need to tackle it head on. The sooner you do so, the sooner you will be free.

- Your situation in life will never be perfect
- Happiness and peace of mind don't come from a perfect life
- It is not possible to outrun anxiety
- You must face life from where you stand right now

—Dr. David Hanscom