

Thriving During Times of COVID-19 **by Kate Nelson**

Change seems to be ubiquitous right now. Our communities, families, work, daily routines are experiencing change at a breakneck speed. From the macro to the most micro levels, each of our lives are shifting. It would be easy to just say “our world is changing”, which of course it is. But the way each individual processes the change happening in our world at large is in the big and small ways our individual lives are changing. While the headline is “pandemic”, for each of us individually, the story is about how our personal lives are shifting.

As human beings, we continually strive to feel control, understanding, support, and purpose. We need to feel like we have some semblance of control of our lives, we need to feel as though we understand what is happening around us, we yearn to feel supported, and we need to feel that we each matter by fulfilling some purpose. During change, control, understanding, support and purpose are often thrown out of equilibrium.

When that equilibrium is out of whack, we start to show signs of anxiety, frustration, irritation, and depression. Even in ‘non-COVID’ times, change is hard. Today, with the pandemic raging around us, dealing with change is even harder.

Why is change harder to navigate for people now than it was before the pandemic? Because on top of the typical drivers of change, there are large looming unknowns that are completely out of our control. When will there be a vaccine? When will widespread testing be available? When will kids go back to school? How much will the economy suffer and when will it rebound? Will my job (if I still have one) be safe? The questions go on and on and on.

Navigating Change Today

During times of change, it is helpful to think about how we can actively work to reestablish a sense of control, understanding, support and purpose. Just because this is an especially difficult time does not mean that we can’t help ourselves deal with the ambiguity around us productively to minimize the negative effects of change. Finding that equilibrium is indeed possible. It just means you need to work a little harder to find it.

Control

There is indeed a lot of uncertainty that we really can’t control, but we can absolutely feel in control of some of the aspects of our personal and professional lives. Break tasks down into small, bitesize chunks that you can take on slowly and carefully. Start with small steps that you know you can succeed in. Need to create a video? Instead of starting with the task “create a script” for the video, start with one or two smaller tasks like “create an outline”. Practice the art of making lists of small manageable tasks that you can “check off” throughout the day. That hit of dopamine each time you check something off will help you feel more control over your day and your life.

Understanding

While conflicting or confusing guidance from leaders and newsmakers makes understanding in some areas hard to come by, you can still build a sense of understanding by staying informed about the things that matter to you. For information about the world at large, find a few sources you trust for information and check in daily to see what is new. Stay in the loop on what is going on at work. Keep track of emails and news about your company and customers. Make time to communicate with your family or the people you live with to talk through what you expect of each other while sharing working space, chores, etc... Be explicit about what each of you are doing and need on a day to day basis.

Support

We are social and communal beings. This time of social distancing and physical separation has robbed many of us of our ability to be close to people which can make us feel alone. But we can still feel supported in this environment if we are creative. Using electronic tools like Zoom, FaceTime, MicroSoft Teams, GoToMeeting, etc... lets us talk and share while seeing each other in real time. As an added bonus, seeing inside of each other's homes, hearing work colleagues talk to their kids or pets are ways that the connections between office mates can even be strengthened during quarantine. Support can also come from joining group activities like online concerts or virtual events. Sharing experiences builds community and reinforces that we are not going through this alone.

Purpose

Economic upheaval and physical separation have left many feeling like they no longer have a purpose that matters if they are not in first responder roles. But we can still find purpose and make a difference that matters to us, and hopefully others. When a shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was first reported, it was a natural instinct for people to start sewing masks. That instinct was to help others, but also to help us feel useful and needed. We can cultivate purpose by helping others. Reach out to people in front line roles to see if they need help, or people in vulnerable populations who need support. Tutor kids online who are struggling with homeschooling. Write letters to people who might appreciate some kindness from afar. The list of ways we can help others and simultaneously give ourselves a boost is endless.

Embracing Change Today and Tomorrow

Change is not over. As the economy slowly restarts, more changes are inevitable. So, this is when you get to work. If you are struggling, that is OK. Recognize it and be patient with yourself. Think about how you can maintain your sense of control today and tomorrow. Seek to understand some parts of the world around you, however wide or narrow in scope. Develop and cultivate the support you need now and in the future. And strive to make a difference that matters to you and people around you.