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get to the other side. The tasks we do as accountants range from the ...

Jul. 15, 2021



By Chase Birky, CPA.

The inescapable truth of being human is that life is, in many ways, a series of difficult and varied struggles. If you read this sentence as depressing or defeatist, chances are you've been able to find purpose and meaning within these struggles. If that sentence resonated with you, you might find yourself where I've found myself more than once: in the midst of something that feels truly awful.

As accountants, we are problem-solvers by nature. And that may be why it is natural

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A few days in, it was clear this wasn't just a blip in the radar, so I packed my bags and got on the next flight to visit her in the hospital. Once there, I instantly found myself questioning (my dad would use the word "confronting") doctors and nurses, researching hours on end to find the cause and making every effort to point the doctors in the right direction, since it didn't seem to me that they could pinpoint a cause or offer a prognosis. Nor does it seem like we have any real answers as I write this. It's a problem I cannot resolve on my own, and one that will have an indeterminate duration.

Everyone's struggles are different, and although you may not necessarily relate to mine, I would imagine you're acutely aware of your own. In the midst of these situations, how do we move forward in a meaningful and intentional way as opposed to just going through the motions on autopilot while we're trying to cope?

Practice meta-awareness, or mindfulness. Simply recognizing that you're having an emotional reaction to a situation will help reduce the severity of your emotions and better allow you to control your response, Sean Webb explains in his book *Mind Hacking Happiness*. In my experience, pausing to take a mental inventory can seem like a detour in the moment, but it really does help you focus on what's important in the here and now—which ultimately allows you to perform better.

Take control of your schedule through proactive communication. Be realistic about what interactions are going to help you during this period, which ones are going to drain you even further and which are essential—and which are not. You've got to conserve—and hopefully replenish—energy. Spending it poorly is only going to exacerbate the problem. To relieve some of your immediate anxiety, reaching out to those you have meetings with and letting them know that you need to reschedule will help a lot. The level of disclosure you are comfortable with as to the reason is ultimately your call and situation-specific.

Consider spending time with friends. If you're an extrovert, you might find that

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be able to fully focus until you've done your part, whatever that may be.

Once you've taken some action to clear your head, you may need to gather some momentum by completing some of the smaller items on your to-do list. Building that momentum is your best bet for being able to tackle the deeper work on your plate. Turn on some music you love (or at least music that elevates your mood or propensity to focus) and get started. Don't be overly critical of yourself if you're not progressing through the work as you'd hoped to. Focus is a muscle, and it's likely impaired from everything that you've been going through. Take a short break, maybe even meditate, as needed. Come back to the work. Rinse and repeat.

Other ideas that have worked for me, in no particular order, are:

Prioritize sleep, exercise and adequate hydration. Not getting enough of sleep or water can run you down on any given day and make everything harder than it needs to be. Abandoning exercise will show up in the form of decreased energy eventually. Also, vigorous exercise will release the endorphins that will improve your mental state when things are at their most difficult.

Get the hardest things done earlier in the day. Each morning brings with it some form of a reset, which is key when you know other concerns will pile on as the day progresses. As that happens, your capacity to think critically, clearly and creatively diminishes (unless you're a full-on night owl type). We all know this, but few of us actually structure our day to take advantage of it.

Schedule something into your day that gives you life, and hopefully a laugh. It doesn't have to be big. It doesn't have to be time-consuming. But self-care does have to be an essential part of your day.

When you're feeling anxious about your lack of control over a distressing situation,

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Chase Birky is a licensed CPA and CEO & co-founder of [Dark Horse CPAs](#), a top accounting and tax firm serving small businesses and individuals. Dark Horse is a democratized CPA firm that empowers CPAs at all stages of their career to elevate their practice, scale their book of business, leverage proprietary technology and collaborate with like-minded, progressive CPAs.

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