

It's Not a Crisis; It's an Inconvenience!

The A-Z Mindful Survival Guide
for When Life Gets Messy!



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Preface

“It’s not a crisis; it’s an inconvenience!”

“It’s not a crisis; it’s an inconvenience!” is the title of this book for two reasons. First, it cuts right to the heart of the matter: life gets messy, and we don’t need to escalate everyday stressors and approach them with explosive reactions.

Second, it’s a simple reminder that can be the key to a healthy perspective on life. It’s the moment-to-moment reflections during the challenging times that keep us on track to finding joy. We may have broad, overarching philosophies about life, such as *“I am free to make my own choices,”* or *“I am in charge of my own destiny,”* but those have to be nourished by small reminders such as *“It’s not a life-changing event if I miss the sale at the mall.”* *“It’s not the end of the world if I’m a few minutes late because I got stuck in traffic.”* *“I’m not going to perish if I end up in the line that moves the slowest.”* ***“It’s not a crisis; it’s just an inconvenience!”***

When we set aside the day-to-day complexities of life, all roads seem to beckon us back to a few simple things: love, joy, laughter, belonging.

Our thoughts, habits, and behaviors are forces that we control. If we are mindful, these thoughts and actions change us—and the world—for the better.

It’s easy to create misery, blame, and helplessness. The upside to self-induced despair is that there is no work, no risk, no responsibility, and no accountability involved. Happiness, on the other hand, takes hard work, a great deal

of risk, a solid measure of responsibility, and a strong dose of accountability.

The good news is that we only have to work on taking care of the little things, and when we do, the big things seem to take care of themselves. Try it. Smile—right here, right now. It's worth it, even as you read this page. It's the small things (like that smile) that nurture our aptitude for happiness. Get busy—don't delay—because *now* is the only moment that counts. It's the only moment you truly have.

Take a breath; perform a kind gesture; count a blessing; hug a loved one. This is your life—live it well.

A

Abandonment

Sooner or later, most of us experience feelings of abandonment. However, even if others abandon you, don't abandon yourself. If someone on life's path abandons you, don't consume yourself with thoughts of your "obvious" lack of worth. When one person abandons another, it usually has more to do with that person's problems and shortcomings than it does with the other's value or ability to meet their needs.

If you are abandoned, don't let that be your excuse to abandon others. If you are abandoning people because they don't live up to your perfectionistic needs, reevaluate your life. If others are abandoning you because you don't live up to their perfectionistic needs, reevaluate your relationships.

Never take for granted how important it is to stick with the important people in your life. We all need someone who will never abandon us, and we all need people whom we would never abandon—even if they irritate us sometimes.

*If you stick with people who have potential,
it will always come back to you twentyfold,
and you'll be glad you did.*

Alive

You are as alive as you make up your mind to be, and it is your duty to give that spark, spirit, and liveliness away. The great social psychologist Erich Fromm said, "*What does*

one person give to another? He gives of himself, of the most precious he has, he gives of his life...he gives him of that which is alive in him...."

Our duty to our beautiful gift of life is to stay alive—not just physically, but emotionally and psychologically as well. All of those things that are most alive in us—joy, humor, laughter, love, and compassion—need to be given away every day of our lives. Once you start giving them, away you'll realize that their supply is inexhaustible.

Allow

Too often we evaluate life in a distant past tense. But sometimes the best of life is right in front of us. Even if you are doing the most mundane things, allow the meaning of each moment to come to you. Take a breath, and allow yourself to say, *"Isn't this nice?"*

Sometimes this is easy. If you're with people you enjoy spending time with, it's not hard to think about how nice the companionship is. But allowing yourself to notice the good in other situations can be challenging.

Just sitting at the dinner table? Isn't it nice that you have something to eat? At work? Isn't it nice that you have a job? Stuck in traffic? Isn't it nice that you have a car and a place to go?

It's not always what's *supposed* to happen that matters. Sometimes it's what you *allow* to happen that really makes a difference.

Allow life to come to you.



*Several years ago, when I was teaching a group counseling class, one of my graduate students was facilitating one day as part of the assignment. This student initiated an activity in which everyone in the group had to tell something that was meaningful in his or her life on **that** day. When it came to me, the only thing that came out of my mouth was, "Baseball cards! Baseball cards are meaningful!"*

I got some quiet reactions from my students, but all I could think about was how earlier in the day, while I had sipped my coffee, I had watched two little boys trade Cal Ripken and Nolan Ryan baseball cards, then stuff them into the back pockets of their jeans and run out the door to catch the school bus. In that moment, I embraced the idea that the greatest joys we have are not necessarily the ones we pursue but rather the ones we allow to come to us. Sometimes it's often much simpler than we think.

On a given day, children and baseball cards may be all we need to see the meaning of life. Tomorrow it may be a smile from a clerk, or letting someone get in front of you in traffic, or the gift of a compliment. Allow it to happen.

Alone (Know This: You're Not)

Kenny Chesney is one of the great singer-songwriters of our time. He wrote a song called "I Didn't Get Here Alone." In it, Kenny sang about how he may have been singled out by the spotlight while performing for millions of people, but there were many loved ones who helped to get him there.

Wherever you've gone and wherever you go, no matter how isolated you are, you are never alone. People all over the world and throughout history have experienced the same problems, stresses, fears, and losses as you. Many people who have overcome an obstacle in life are happy to reach back and help others cross over it as well.

When you recognize that you are not alone on any journey, you become humbled, gracious, and grateful, and perhaps that is what Kenny was experiencing. It's a wonderful feeling to embrace that support.

When you realize that you are never truly alone, it also becomes easier to say, *"I need people."*

Most of life's problems are not solved alone. Many people have solved their most difficult challenges by merely reaching out and saying, *"I need help."* Research suggests that about 75% of the population can change a personal habit with much greater success by seeking a solution while using the support of a group. Whether it's depression, loneliness, alcoholism, grief, or anxiety, you'll have a better chance of getting where you want to go if you understand that *you don't have to get there alone.*

It's okay to admit that you may not be able to handle every situation in life by yourself. Open your arms to that vulnerability, and you'll find yourself rewarded for it.

You are not alone.

Apathy

Apathy is the biggest obstacle to having a life filled with loving and caring relationships. Leo Buscaglia, author of the classic book *Love*, said it best: *"The opposite of love is not hate; it's apathy."*

Relationships, marriages, and families don't fall apart because people suddenly start hating each other. They fall apart when people say, "*I don't care.*"

Never give up on your instinctive capacity to care for others and for life itself. Whenever you have the urge to stop caring, push it back. Stay true to your loving nature.

The three easiest words to say in life are "I don't care," and the more you say them, the harder it is to find love, peace of mind, and joy. Something dies inside you every time you say those three little words.

It takes work to stay clear of apathy and apathetic people, but it is *always* worth it.

Apologies

Some of the greatest destruction that takes place in relationships is not a result of what we do but of what we *don't* do. There are few guarantees in relationships, but there is one thing that's certain: the worst kind of partner in any relationship is the one who is never wrong and who never apologizes. Don't hesitate to admit when you are wrong. Apologies don't absolve you of guilt or responsibility, but they do make a statement: *I was wrong, and I'm working on getting it right.*

Always hand out apologies where apologies are due.

Armor

Each day we wake to news of cruelty, violence, and dishonesty. We can let these stories harden us, or we can renew our psychological strength with an emotional armor—one made of hope, optimism, patience, and love.

The best thing about equipping yourself with emotional armor is that it isn't burdensome or heavy; in fact, it makes you feel lighter.

The armor of hope allows you not only to be happier, it keeps you stronger and healthier.

The armor of optimism shields you from those who are always anticipating the worst that can happen.

The armor of patience allows the hostilities of life to bounce off you.

The armor of love reminds you that you are never alone.

Attempts

Fearful, overcautious people often criticize ambitious people. They say, *"Your problem is that your plate is too full! You have too many things going on at the same time! You're in danger of being unable to finish all of them."*

Perhaps they are right. Ambitious people often try to do too many things at once, and many of them end up with unfinished projects. They also make themselves susceptible to failure and stress. But consider: It's far more gratifying to live a life in which you participate in as many experiences as you can wrap your arms around than to live a life in which you regret all the things you never tried to accomplish.

Complacent people say, *"I always wanted to write a book/earn a degree/take a trip/build a treehouse/learn to play the piano...."* Those who risk little gain little. Gratification never comes to those who are content just to sit on the couch. You are better living a life of a million attempts than one with a million regrets.

Take note of those people who didn't stop after multiple attempts. If you are reading this book from a lighted device or under a lamp, be thankful that Edison made more than a thousand attempts to invent the light bulb before he got it right.

*No attempt was ever wasted
if it prompted you to move on to another attempt.*

Attention

Think about attention, and practice constructive habits of attention. We insult others when we fail to pay attention.

When you are being spoken to, whether you are sitting in a meeting, attending a class, or listening to someone tell you about his or her day, don't look at your phone or tablet. Your gesture of inattentiveness is dismissive and disrespectful.

Do yourself and your loved ones a favor, and never bring an electronic device to dinner. If you have children, make sure you have family time every day during which you put the electronics away. On long trips, allow some time for electronics, but also insist that at least 51% of the time be spent in conversation or playing road games. In the end, you'll find that those moments are the ones that bring you closer.

People can only focus on one thing at a time. Renowned juggler Anthony Gatto set a world record in 2006 by juggling nine balls for 54 seconds. Gatto, an undisputed master at juggling, may be able to juggle many items at once, but even he can only think about one catch and one throw at a time. It's impossible to think about all nine items at the same time. Each ball is, at least for a moment, the center of focus. If

the juggler doesn't focus on each one in its turn, the whole process goes awry.

When you are in a conversation, pay attention to the person who is speaking. Attention is more than just listening for the sake of being able to respond intelligently; it can be a gift that makes another person feel good, and *not* paying attention can be an insult. Have you ever sat down to talk to someone, and you knew that the person wasn't listening? Our brains unconsciously detect when someone isn't paying attention, and it causes an emotion: disappointment, frustration, rejection, sadness, hurt. Relationships of all kinds suffer over issues of inattention.

Conversely, think about what it's like to sit down with someone who gives you his or her full attention. It feels good to have the other person look into your eyes and honor your integrity. It makes you feel significant and important.

Be thoughtful in your attention. If you are lacking, learn to pay attention. It is a conscious act of respect.

*There is nothing more important than love,
and it is best communicated through attention.*



*Paying attention may come in handy some day, as I learned the hard way. If your spouse drops you off in front of the store, and you run in quickly to buy something, and then you run back out to your car, be sure to pay attention to the car you are entering. It may be a white minivan that looks exactly like the white minivan you own, but it may not be **your** minivan. If this occurs, you may end up buckling your seat belt and looking up at the driver, who is wearing a hairnet and holding a cigarette in her hand, and then you realize that she is not your spouse (because your*

spouse does not own a hairnet, nor does she smoke), and you realize you are not in your car, and you say the only intelligent thing that comes to mind: "Hey, you're not Annie!" Then you may realize that this terrified, horrified, shock-faced stranger looks like she may be ready to call the police. At that time, you may glance through the rear window of this stranger's minivan to see your wife (who may be named Annie), and you cannot hear her, but you can see her body language as she and your children appear to be laughing hysterically in the white minivan that looks exactly like your white minivan because it really is your white minivan, and you are in the wrong vehicle because you weren't paying attention. If this should happen to you, you may return to your vehicle and have to listen to others say through peals of laughter, "Did you do that on purpose? Oh my! Dad, I was laughing so hard! Why did you do that? Dad! You totally freaked that lady out!"

No, I did not do that on purpose. No man in his right mind would do that on purpose. I wasn't paying attention.

The moral of the story is this: Learn when to pay attention, or you may frighten strangers!

Awareness

Be aware of the turmoil in the world. Be aware of the anger, impatience, hostility, and pain that is out there. But more importantly, be aware of whether you are one who adds to the turmoil or one who calms it. In all that we do, we are either adding to the turmoil or reducing it. Seek to do the latter, not the former.