Living and Thriving in Anxious Times

Mix this sluggish economy, stubbornly high unemployment, uncertain politics, and airline mergers together and you’ve got a big bowl of stress stew.

Add to it a heaping dose of the “do-more-with-less” workplace, along with a fast-paced, ever-changing, technology-driven world, and what you end up with is a perfect recipe for freak-out time!

Can you still thrive in this environment? The answer is yes.

So what now? Is this truly the end of the world we once knew? Are our best days behind us? And if so, how do we cope with what’s to come?

There are no easy answers, but two things remain true: 1) it is not as bad as it seems, and 2) you have more control over your future than you think.

Coping with Anxiety

The world’s problems seem too big for you to handle for one simple reason—they are!

Think about it—you have little to no control over weighty things like crime, poverty, oppression, terrorism, and world hunger. What you can control, however, are your thoughts, actions, associations, and lifestyle. This is key to a happier life.

With that in mind, here are some tips to help you manage stress and anxiety:

• Learn your triggers. Carefully note what sets off your anxiety, and limit your exposure to it.
• Spot quickly and interrupt negative feedback loops with positive reinforcement. Anxiety often comes from playing out “what if” and doomsday scripts in your head. Keep motivational, spiritual, and affirming literature at hand, or even your own private “positivity hot link” on your computer—music, video, narrative, or images that instantly help you “reset” your mind.
• Cut yourself a break when you’re overwhelmed. Agree to do what you can, when you can. Let that be enough for the day.
• Let go of worst-case scenarios. Most of what we fear never comes to pass. When or if a crisis ever hits, options will appear at that time to help you deal with it.
• Realize that fretting is not productive. The world doesn’t change because you are concerned and unhappy. It’s OK to be cheerful even in the face of misfortune.
• Get moving. Worry is undirected energy. Put that energy to use on something positive and productive.
• Seek out positive, uplifting people. Your happiness is directly related to your influences.
• Learn relaxation techniques like yoga and deep breathing exercises.
• Exercise regularly. Seriously, for dozens of reasons that you have already been beaten over the head with, this is one of your most powerful “feel better” strategies.
• Accept that it takes time to change. Hint: Focus on lowering the intensity and length of worrying, rather than eradicating it completely.

Finally, don’t beat yourself up for feeling anxious. A certain amount of stress is unavoidable.

The key to managing it is changing your habitual reactions to it. Your Employee Assistance Program has the knowledge, tools, and resources to help. Don’t hesitate to contact your IAM EAP coordinator for assistance and information the next time you’re feeling stressed out, depressed, or overwhelmed.