

The Economy and Our Quality of Life

The current financial and economic crisis is real. It will most likely be long and protracted. For millions, navigating this crisis will be a life-changing experience. As such, two important questions need answers: (1) How will this change my life? and (2) How will I choose to face this journey?

"My days of whining and complaining about others have come to an end. Nothing is easier than fault finding." - Og Mandino

Internal beliefs

During this crisis, much of what we think, believe and feel about how we live our lives, what we need to do and have to be happy and successful, and what kind of work defines me, etc., may no longer provide the support for a healthy sense of well-being, success or financial stability. For example, how we feel about our work, our career, the house we live in, the material needs we have, etc. are beliefs and assumptions that we may need to change.

Many believe their notions of how the world is, how it should be and how they are in it are all correct and never need changing. But, we see and know everything is changing - always. The current crisis is a huge tug on our sleeve, saying, "If we do not change our thoughts about ourselves and about life, we may not be able to sustain our continuous personal growth and development." In fact, our old thoughts and paradigms may be inhibiting our natural growth processes, and block our soul from manifesting its intelligence in these rough times. It is easy to recognize people who think and feel the same way as they have always thought and felt in how they live their life at work, at home and in relationship. These times call for taking a serious step back and reconsidering.

In good times, and bad, we need to continuously challenge ourselves to learn, to see life from differing perspectives, to enlarge our vision, and to rediscover or re-create ourselves. In these times, our soul is seeking to arise to meet changing needs. Now, more than ever, we need to allow ourselves to be open and conscious of how our soul is operating in our lives. If we don't, and remain mired in our mental and emotional status quo, pain and suffering are the most likely results.

How I approach change

How one approaches change is a choice, pure and simple. One can approach impending change with an attitude of positivity, seeing this experience as a blessing in disguise, an opportunity, or with a negative, resistant attitude - that this is being done to me - and fight their experience kicking and screaming. Whether we respond positively or react negatively and defensively is a function of how we view pain and suffering. When we approach life as a learning experience, we look to understand what the pain is trying to teach us - to find meaning in the challenge and upset.

These times present an opportunity to see what we need to see about ourselves. The desire to escape or deny our challenges rather than to meet them head on as a valuable learning opportunity, leads only to more pain and suffering.

These challenging times call for resiliency the willingness and ability to be flexible, steadfast, optimistic and open to change, growth and learning. Those who are not willing or able to be resilient will most likely experience burnout, exhaustion, confusion, malaise, depression, resistance and cynicism. Most folks are not naturally resilient; resiliency has to be consciously learned and, more importantly, practiced.

Hard choices

In the throes of this economic crises, many will have to make hard choices, large and small whether or not

to renew their insurance policy, move into a smaller house or other space, sell one of their cars, send their child to a less-expensive college or perhaps no college at all, change jobs and career, give up their pet, have fewer lattes or dine out less each week, postpone vacations, buy fewer clothes, etc. How folks approach these choices will determine the degree of well-being they experience. If they see life's challenges as opportunities to grow their souls, mature and learn about themselves, well-being will be a part of their reality. If they see themselves as victims, chances are well-being will be largely overshadowed by anger, depression, dis-ease and disharmony.

Reactivity to fear

In these times, fear and anxiety are *huge* issues. Another important consideration is how folks are dealing with their emotions. Some are seeking professional support from therapists, clergy, coaches and trusting friends; others are acting out their emotions through drug, alcohol and food abuse, engaging in illicit affairs and infidelity, and gambling. Still others are in denial hoping that the problem will go away if they don't acknowledge it, engaging in distractions and seeking a false sense of relief.

Self-awareness and self-responsibility

"Take your life in your own hands and what happens? A terrible thing: no one to blame." - Erica Jong

For those who are not averse to facing the crisis head-on, growing their emotional and spiritual maturity, and are willing to do some deep soul searching and self-reflection, this crisis provides an opportunity for exploration the type of exploration that can lead one to uncovering the truth of their lives while leading to extraordinary personal growth. This is an opportunity to take a serious look at ones life by honestly and sincerely asking and answering questions such as:

What's most important in my life?

In what types of activities have I been engaged that are really not making appropriate use of my time and energies?

Have I been focused on experiencing true and real connection, intimacy and happiness with my spouse/partner, and family?

Have I been overly consumed with money and material possessions, and if so, why?

Is my self-worth defined by my net worth?

Am I exacerbating my and my family's pain by refusing to cut back and make hard decisions or by staying in denial?

Am I spending money I don't have and living beyond my (our) means?

The strategy

There are a number of actions and attitudes that can support one to become resilient, to consciously move through these challenging times on an even keel.

First, being open to change is very empowering. Don't just look at your corner of the painting, make an effort to see the big picture and where you can fit in - in your career life, in your life at home, in your community. What needs upgrading and downsizing? Who needs to be in your career and social circle in a supportive way? Let go of the need to be in control of everything. Consider the steps you need to take to move forward.

Second, explore what knowledge, skills and abilities will help you navigate these rough times. Create an action plan and pursue these steps one at a time, notice if you are resistant and why.

Third, explore why you are on the planet. This exploration will support you to create a conscious and healthy context within which you will create, or re-create, a new-improved you that can meet today's

challenges and opportunities. Explore who you are, really, inside and outside of work and pursue those skills, interests and activities that will support your honest and realistic image, not a fake and phony you.

Fourth, explore how your knowledge and skills may be transferable to both existing and new career areas and how you can support businesses to be more successful.

Fifth, spend time in self-reflection. Take time regularly to explore your attitudes, feelings and emotions. Explore what you're learning about yourself during this journey. What do-ing and be-ing patterns are supporting you and which are sabotaging your journey? Which are relieving stress and which contribute to upset? Which are deepening your relationships with loved ones and which are causing emotional, physical and psychological separation from others? Which reflect positive self-management efforts and effective time management practices? And, which don't?

Finally, explore any stories you are telling yourself that point to doom and gloom. Are these stories really, really true or are you using them to rationalize and justify denial, doing nothing, and maintaining your status- quo way of living your life in the face of mounting odds? Be honest. Are you refusing to take a risk and see what's possible out there? How do you need to prioritize your life?

What I need, not what I want

"It is not action or effort that we must surrender; it is self-will, and this is terribly difficult. You must do your best constantly, yet never allow yourself to become involved in whether things work out the way you want." - Eknath Easwaran

The Universe often acts in strange ways - strange according to our idea of how things should be; but quite appropriately according to our True Nature. Honest self-reflection can bring us to the realization that life's challenges and struggles may not give us what we want (our ego-mind), but will often give us what we need (our souls growth) what we need in order to become more caring, compassionate, humble, ego-less, and emotionally and spiritually mature human beings. In the process of self-discovery, we learn to become wiser, stronger, more courageous and resilient, and perhaps for the first time in our lives understand the true meaning of less *is* more. That, in fact, this crisis can be a blessing in disguise.

So, our \$10 food for thought questions are:

- How are you faring in these challenging times? How are your moods, your emotions?
- What are your greatest fears right now and how are you dealing with these?
- What decisions are you avoiding and resisting? Why? Are you in denial?
- What thought and behavior patterns are supporting you or limiting/sabotaging you as you navigate these rough waters?
- What creative efforts are you crafting to move forward?
- How are you supporting your family to get through this together? Or, are you separating emotionally from your family?
- What is your heart telling you that your brain contradicts?
- Are you allowing a victim mentality to keep you from acting?
- What support do you need right now, and from whom, to help you cope and move forward? What steps are you taking to get this support?
- What defense mechanisms are you using to resist change?

Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D, C.P.C. is the founder of True North Partnering an Atlanta-based company that supports conscious living through coaching and facilitating. With a practice based on the dynamic intersection of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Peter's approach focuses on personal, business, relational and spiritual coaching. He is a professional speaker and published author. For more information, www.truenorthpartnering.com, or pvajda(at)truenorthpartnering.com, or phone 770.804.9125. You can also follow Peter on Twitter: @petergvajda