4 Steps to Help Entrepreneurs Cope With Anxiety

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2020 has made it abundantly clear that life is full of challenges. People face challenges with their finances, health, family, relationships, business and even personal battles. For many entrepreneurs, this year has provided one challenge after another. It's true what they say, "When it rains, it pours."

In tough times, it's important to keep in mind what the American business philosopher Jim Rohn said, "It is not what happens that determines the major part of your future. What happens, happens to us all. It is what you do about what happens that counts." Covid-19 has certainly affected some entrepreneurs more than others. But with hardship, comes learning and opportunity.

Best-selling author, speaker and marketer Brendon Burchard had a near-death experience during his stay in the Dominican Republic. He was in a car that was moving too fast around a winding, dark road when it reached a hairpin curve going 60 mph and crashed. Somehow, he survived. But when Burchard pulled himself through the shattered windshield and stood on the crumpled hood, he had a moment of clarity. It was there he came up with three fundamental questions that shaped his life — Did I live? Did I love? Did I matter?

In 2004, my wife and I found ourselves in our cabin, as it imploded on us while a tsunami ripped through the small Thai

town of Khao Lak. It's been almost 16 years, but if I close my eyes, I can still see everything unfold clearly.

Unlike Burchard though, I didn't come away with some profound understanding of life. I did, however, believe I had been given a second chance. I came back to Japan believing I was put here for a reason. I still can't quite say what that is. Perhaps it was to raise my son to be a champion, or maybe to simply help my wife get things off the top shelf. That was the year my life as an entrepreneur moved into high gear.

I started working with other entrepreneurs to help them get their businesses off the ground. Some were very successful, others not so much. Each one taught me a valuable lesson.

Financially, 2020 started off well for me. Then Covid-19 hit, and the wheels fell off. There are those entrepreneurs who have certainly benefitted from the world shifting from a brick-and-mortar business model to the work-from-home model, as Jeff Besos or Elon Musk can attest. I simply weathered the storm. Some have not fared as well. For them, 2020 has been fraught with fear.

Fear is not what most people think it is. There is fear that comes in the form of a tsunami or a criminal brandishing a weapon, but most fears lie within the confines of our own minds – fear of the unknown, fear of failing, fear of bankruptcy, fear of not being good enough. Those fears are anxiety in disguise.

For entrepreneurs, anxiety is very real. In fact, according to one study, an incredible 72% of entrepreneurs surveyed admitted to having mental problems. They leave behind the so-called security of a paycheck because they believe in what they have to offer to the world. Entrepreneurship can come at a price, just ask restaurateurs and those involved with travel. According to Yelp, a stunning 16,000 restaurants closed their doors for good this year alone.

Whether you're thriving, surviving or struggling, anxiety is always there. The question has to be, how can we deal with it?

Here are 4 simple steps to overcoming anxiety.

Step 1: Write a gratitude list

One thing that 2020 has taught me is that we have to fight negativity with positivity. The first thing we must do when faced with anxiety is to take stock of all we have in our lives.

Make a gratitude list. Write down absolutely everything in your life that you appreciate—from having a roof over your head to good friends to fast reflexes. Anything. Just write for 30 minutes straight with no distractions.

Appreciate anything and everything. We might not be where we want to be, but if we are lucky enough to be able to provide for our families, then that's a good place to start. There are those who may find themselves out of work, but if they have their health, then that goes on the list. Good friends, well-adjusted kids, a good collection of books, the new iPad Pro, all go on your list. It sounds silly, but when we stop to take stock of all that we have, we might surprise ourselves with how much we have to be thankful for.

After finishing your list, read it twice a day—once after you wake up and before your head hits the pillow. It's amazing how this simple exercise will change your perception of anxiety.

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Step 2: Exercise

Tony Robbins is famous for saying that physiology proceeds psychology. Through movement, we can hotwire our brains.

Moderate exercise releases endorphins, hormones and chemicals into our bloodstream that change how our body feels, which in turn changes how our brain feels.

Personally, I love competition. Whether it's playing basketball with a bunch of friends or climbing an 11-meter wall at the rock-climbing gym, challenge pushes me.

So hit the gym, put on those running shoes (or like me, put on a martial art dogi) and start sweating.

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The simplest, and possibly most effective way of dealing with anxiety is getting a good night's sleep. That doesn't mean wasting the day away. It simply means we must get seven to eight hours of sleep. No sleeping pills. Just good old-fashioned uninterrupted sleep.

For those struggling to get a good night's sleep, according to Harvard Medical School here are a few things you can do to improve your sleep

– Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and large meals.

– Keep your room cool, dark, quiet, and free from distractions.

– Be outside for at least 30 minutes a day, as daylight sets your sleeping patterns.

– Use breathing exercises to help relax the body before going to sleep.

– Taking a warm bath before going to bed.

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Step 4: Meditate

Life has a way of messing things up. But before we overreact, the first thing we must do is calm ourselves. Meditation helps us clear out all the noise in our lives.

I do martial arts, and before we begin every training, we sit in “seiza” and close our eyes for a few moments. Though it’s only a few seconds, it allows me to clear my mind of all the clutter. YouTube has a number of good meditation exercises. I recommend you give them a try and find one that works for you.

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