

Mental agility: shifting to optimism during lockdown

Alexandra Pearson from The Yurt Academy shares her advice and experience to help people to stay positive, productive and in control during this period of change and isolation.

As we enter a period of unimaginable change most of our lives are being turned upside down, both at home and at (home) work. Based on our experience of living through the SARS epidemic, and staying in close contact with friends still in China who are months ahead of us in this COVID-19 pandemic, we believe that many of us will go through a cycle of emotions as we live through isolation and social distancing and adjust to working in a virtual setting.

We've named the four phases: Uncertainty. Frustration. Acceptance. Optimism.

To accompany people through the four phases we have designed a series of live online interactive masterclasses, to support individual emotional and physical wellbeing, build skills, and create a deep connection to self, team and community.

Uncertainty

During the phase of uncertainty, we scramble to make sense of all the changes around us. We feel anxious and look for ways to protect those closest to us. We are unsure of how we as individuals will deal with the situation and are

concerned about how our loved ones will cope. It is almost impossible to take on the enormity of the changes ahead. It takes all our strength to stay mentally resilient and able to support ourselves and those around us.

Frustration

After weeks of isolation, we enter a phase of frustration and helplessness. Everything we normally do is out of reach. We are stripped of even the most mundane of small pleasures; a coffee with friends, lunch with family, a visit to the cinema. We are paralysed in our ability to grow. It takes enormous effort to gain control of our situation and convert this monumental challenge into an opportunity for reflection and growth.

Read also

[Why we need our human skills more than ever](#)

Acceptance

The effort pays off and we find meaningful ways to spend our time growing strong as individuals and communities. In this phase of acceptance, our reflection leads to small changes that have significance and will make the world a better place. And in the distance, we see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Optimism

The world has changed. Our worlds have changed. Nothing is as it was. New seeds of opportunity have sprung from fertile ground of change. As we move into the optimism phase we need to be agile, and to prepare ourselves to be the best we can be in this brave new world.

Staying connected

The experience leaves a scar, one that reminds us how interconnected we are all are in sickness and in health, in mind and in body. We need connectedness

more than ever. We need to be connected to ourselves, our passions, strengths and needs. We need to be connected to others, to collaborate and share, to be creative and innovate across disciplines. We need to be connected to the world in which we live, the global world of different peoples, of animals and nature, of art and culture, and of extreme beauty and inspiration.

Turning challenges into opportunities

Now is the time to support your remote teams and those still turning up at their places of work every day. Everyone is having a difficult time in their own way. With support, challenges can become opportunities for new ways of thinking, looking and being. This is the time to help your team members transform this massive challenge into an opportunity for renewal and to give space for real innovative thinking over the coming months. Now is the time to put your positive organisational culture to its ultimate test, to nurture resilience, agility, empathy and compassion and create engaged and collaborative teams.

At the Yurt Academy, we want to be a force for good to help you support your teams not just to get through this period, but to thrive. It's going to be tough, but it could also be very rewarding. You can join our free online series of workshops here.

Alexandra Pearson is an entrepreneur, facilitator and a trainer. She worked in China for 25 years where she established several successful organisations. She has trained and facilitated leaders, managers and employees in personal development, leadership and creative thinking skills, and has cycled from Beijing to Xanadu 25 times. Alex is now Co-director of The Yurt Academy and a Lecturer in Management at The Business School, University of Sussex.

Read also

Home, but not alone. Stay connected, informed and inspired