

## Beating Stress: Optimize Your Thoughts

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I am by nature a pessimist. However, I use optimism as a tool to manage my thoughts and get the most out of any situation. I call myself an “optimistic realist”. In these challenging times, it is not hard to be a little discouraged, confused and stifled by our environment. I do not suggest you should just put on a happy face and ignore the potential pitfalls that surround you.

What I do say is: by optimizing and managing your thoughts, or “emotional states,” you have the best chance for success -- or even survival -- in the climate that surrounds you. Like any system, you will always have the best results if you optimize. No matter how demanding the application, an optimized system always has a better chance than one that does not.

### ***Bad news:***

This article will not solve the obstacles that surround you and the challenges that exist. Only you can do that.

### ***Good news:***

Here is a simple framework and some tips to optimize your thoughts/emotional states and get the most out of your environment.

### ***Better news:***

Everything is based on sound cognitive science; and, when applied, it will work.

### **Skill:**

Periodically and at regular times, (daily or weekly) take 10 -15 minutes to do the following:

1. Go for a walk in nature or sit in a quiet place.
2. For the first five or ten minutes, just relax and enjoy the moment. Do centering exercise, like breathing or body scan (see previous newsletter issues).
3. During the next five or ten minutes, focus on one of the challenges in your life. Review the obstacles and decide how you will manage it. (You may not have a total solution, but at least make a plan of action/next steps.) Do not spend much time dwelling on it. You have likely thought about this a lot already, and most of the information is already there.

Go through the rest of the day or week and do not let this challenge occupy any more of your time. Whenever it comes up, just focus on the solution/plan you have already developed above.

Repeat this process with other challenges over the next month. Go through some of the things that cause you the most worry and stress. If you like, spend a few minutes writing down your thoughts.

## **Science:**

The mind is dynamic and ever-changing (neuro-plasticity is the academic term). Whatever you focus on the most, ripples out into other areas of your mind.

Thus, deciding “how” we will direct our thoughts gives us some control over them. Centering is one example of how you can change these patterns and optimize your thoughts/emotional states.

The mind is made up of an ever-changing group of interrelated patterns, like the swirls in a fractal design. It operates a little like the principle of inheritance in OO programming. Attached to all of our conscious thoughts are a myriad of low level mental patterns that determine the quality, texture or clarity of our thinking. The more we use these patterns to optimize our thoughts/emotional states, the more these patterns are reinforced – and the more we can positively impact our environment.