

Greetings Falcons,

As we know all too well, these uncertain times can feel incredibly stressful – for obvious and not so obvious reasons. Below are a couple of quotes from renowned scientists that provide some insight as to why uncertainty is so stressful.

**Dan Grupe**, a research associate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Investigating Health Minds, said, "Uncertainty itself can lead to a lot of distress for humans." This is because the brain fills in the gaps when it doesn't know or have a reference point. The brain first looks for familiar clues to categorize any given situation as either threatening or safe. If it can't properly figure out whether something is safe, it will categorize it as a threat – just to be on the safe side. This threatening feeling is uncomfortable and sometimes even scary.

**Martin Seligman**, founder of the field of positive psychology, said, "The human mind is automatically attracted to the worst possible case, often very inaccurately. ... Catastrophizing is an evolutionarily adaptive frame of mind, but it is usually unrealistically negative." This tendency to focus on the negative creates anxiety about the unknown and clouds anyone's capacity to think clearly. It also inhibits one's ability to make sound decisions and be their best self. Gaining a higher tolerance to that tension, stress, and discomfort with the unknown will be incredibly helpful during today's era of crisis. However, becoming comfortable with the unknown does not come naturally to most people.

If you are among the majority who struggles with the unknown nature of our current state of the world, keep reading. A few tips are outlined below that may help you to feel more grounded during this unsettled time.

## 1. Design and Follow Consistent Routines and Rituals

Creating predictability in your day-to-day life can be the antidote to uncertainty. Routines provide predictable, stable anchors in your day and week. When you lose your sense of stability it is important to replace it in some way to counteract the uncertainty.

**Tool:** Try to create daily and weekly activities that you can engage in consistently. Here are some examples...

- Try morning meditations or morning routines
- Commit to a consistent bedtime
- Do a lunchtime workout
- Walk the neighborhood after school or work each day
- Join weekly yoga classes or lunches over zoom
- Make your bed each morning
- Feed and walk the dog at the same times each day

## 2. Remember, You Are Not Alone

This global pandemic is affecting every person in the world. Simply remembering that you are among the seven (plus) billion people affected is strangely comforting. We are reminded of our shared vulnerability and connectedness within our human journey.

***Tool:*** When you feel lonely or disheartened, take a moment to reflect on the billions of other people in this world who are also affected by this global crisis. Consider how many others are experiencing the very same lonely thoughts at the very same time as you are. In this way, maybe you are not as alone as you may think.

### **3. Prioritize Self-care**

Taking care of yourself is more important now than ever. Taking care of your physical and emotional needs strengthens your immune system. It is without question that a strong immune system is a benefit to us all.

***Tools:*** Make sure you are:

- Getting at least 8 hours of sleep each night
- Eating a balanced diet
- Exercising
- Practicing some mindfulness
- Expressing your thoughts and feelings in a healthy way (journaling or talking to someone you trust)

Try to incorporate your healthy self-care practices into a routine (see tip#1), and you'll tackle two tips in one.

### **4. Double Down on What You CAN Control**

With so much outside of your control in the middle of a pandemic, and so many unknowns about what, when, and how we will move forward, life can feel quite challenging.

To counteract the lack of control you have regarding who you can see and where you can go, try to focus on things that are within your control. Many folks have taken up cooking and baking during this pandemic. Sure, it is practical in the sense that people need to eat, and restaurants are closed. However, it can also provide comfort. If cooking isn't your thing, try to take up other hobbies or activities where you can take the helm.

***Tool:*** Make it a point to make simple, conscious decisions every day. The simple things like choosing which online workout class to attend, which path to walk, and what to eat for lunch can help you feel in control. This also goes back to #1, *Design and Follow Consistent Routines*. Routines give your life structure that you can actually control, which can feel good when so little is within your control.

### **5. Practice Self-compassion**

Understand that it's going to take time to build your rhythm and tolerance for these new normal circumstances – and it's difficult! So don't beat yourself up if you find yourself struggling. Be patient with yourself as you learn, grow, and adjust. It won't help you at all if you are criticizing yourself throughout the process.

**Tool:** Imagine a close friend or loved one sitting in front of you, struggling with the effects of the pandemic – from the loneliness, schedule, emotions, homeschooling (whatever you are struggling with). What would be your advice to your friend? What words of wisdom and compassion do you have for him or her? Then, apply the advice to your own life.

## 6. Meditate

Meditation can improve your capacity to respond to stress, uncertainty, and volatility, all of which are quite prevalent right now. While meditation cannot change the circumstances of the pandemic, a consistent meditation practice will help you react to the circumstances in a healthy way, rather than with anxiety, fear, and dread. Creating a state of mindfulness and persuading your mind to pause before letting it spin out of control, is a natural extension of meditation.

**Tool:** Begin a daily meditation practice at the same time each day. Start small with five minutes a day and see how it affects you. There are many meditation apps that are helpful (and free). Find one that works for you and give meditation a try.

## 7. View the Change of Pace as an Opportunity

The brain may interpret uncertainty as stressful, but that doesn't mean it has to be ENTIRELY bad. In fact, there are many ways in which the quarantine may support you or your goals. Considering what those are may help shift your mood in a positive direction.

A great quote by Rumi references this perspective:

*"Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead let life live through you. And do not worry that your life is turning upside down. How do you know that the side you are used to is better than the one to come?" ~Rumi*

**Tool:** To embrace this approach, ask yourself "How might the pandemic actually be an opportunity for me?" (For example, more time with family, learn to slow down, time to cook, finally get my room organized, etc....). Take this exercise a step further by asking, "What positive changes might we see in society and the world as a result of this pandemic?"

## 8. Embody Curiosity

Curiosity is a survival skill during times of uncertainty. It can be such a powerful tool because a curious mindset can help alleviate the need people have to be comfortable – and feeling comfortable is unlikely during a global crisis.

Creativity and openness are important ingredients in curiosity. Both are key to managing the unknown gracefully. When you are embracing a curious mindset, you can reframe negative experiences, find silver linings, and see new ways of responding during difficult times. These qualities not only help you endure uncertainty, but can also help you learn and grow as a person.

**Tool:** Choose a new activity you are curious about but have no experience with. Then ... set aside some time to figure it out while adopting a beginner's mind and a curious mindset.

## **9. Connect with People**

It's important to stay connected to those you care about ... from a distance, of course. Even if you are an introvert, having people whom you trust to talk with, listen to, unwind with, support, and lift one another up is critical.

**Tool:** Schedule virtual brunches, lunches, or walk-and-talks over the phone or video can help you keep your relationships strong and supportive during the quarantine.

I hope you find these tips to be helpful.

Take care and stay well,

Ms. McDougall