

Flourishing in tough times:

Tips from Dr. Darek Dawda

BY MATHILDA WATERS



I asked our expert psychologist, Dr. Dawda of DAVDA Psychology, to give us some tips on how those who are affected by the current economic crisis can best cope with it. Not surprisingly, his answers went beyond mere coping.*

MW: What can you say to those who have been negatively affected by the current economic crisis?

DD: I would like to turn this question around. There is enough advice out there on how to cope in tough times. What I would like to focus on instead is how one can maximize the great potential for growth that the difficult times present.

MW: How so?

DD: It's not always easy to see it when you are in the middle of the struggle, but difficult times present unique opportunities to reexamine your life and initiate changes that will create better conditions for your well being. Typically we are caught in patterns; we live by repeating the same routines; we stay in the same environments; we associate with the same people. We mostly repeat what we know, and we don't always pay enough attention to whether that which we do is actually good for us. When some of those patterns collapse, say you lose a relationship or a job or some money in the stock market, at first it might seem like a great tragedy but it might actually be a blessing. And sometimes you need to hit the bottom to actually find enough impetus to reexamine your life in a more fundamental way.

MW: So instead of patching things up, you search for more radical opportunities implicit in the tough times?

DD: Exactly. You lost some money? Well, ask yourself whether your pursuit of wealth has been contributing to your sense of feeling alive, or whether it has been slowly extinguishing the life in you. You don't have as much work to do as you used to? Ask yourself if your job has been nourishing your spirit or suffocating it? If you can no longer afford the lifestyle that you once had, ask yourself whether the pursuit of your standard of living has been a fulfilling mission or whether the standard of living itself has enslaved you to long work hours and stress?

MW: These are good questions. Why do you think people work so much?

DD: Oh, you know, we live in a world full of societal scripts and expectations. How our life should look is given to us through a tradition we are born into. And we typically feel a sense of necessity about these norms and expectations that have been imposed on us. For example, you might accept that work is an inherently noble activity, that the pursuit of status and wealth is worthwhile, that consuming leads to happiness. Many don't get a chance to truly evaluate the impact of their submission to those prescribed ways of living before they are caught in the patterns of getting up at six am and working long stressful days doing meaningless jobs for most of their lives. That's where an economic crisis might turn out to be a blessing, but only if you are willing to rethink your life and take steps to bring more fundamental changes to it.

MW: Are you saying that working is inherently bad for you?

DD: Of course not. Some people truly flourish pursuing their careers or working their jobs. But if you are not, perhaps it is time to connect with that which you desire and need, that which is good for you. Then start redesigning your life in a way that will foster the exuberance of life in you. Why not extricate yourself from the self-perpetuating vicious cycle of consumerist existence that drains life energy out of you, if you are caught in such a pattern. Instead of consuming, try creating. Instead of sacrificing yourself, seek pleasure and fun. Surround yourself with good people. Let the beauty of nature nourish you. Instead of being indoctrinated, seek your own wisdom. It might be a difficult task to wake up and uncompromisingly embrace the gift of life you've been blessed with, but the effort is worth it.

MW: Live in the service of life?

DD: Right.

* Visit www.davda.ca for free Sleep Quiz with Sleep Tips or more information on Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology.