

External and Internal Pressure to 'Max Out' Lockdown Time



Trauma Psychologist Alaa Hijazi's Facebook post has been viewed over 19,000 times. She seems to have struck a chord with many people when she identifies how many motivational commentators talk about 'now is the time to improve yourself' without understanding how this can backfire spectacularly, creating potentially trauma like symptoms, and even predisposing us to develop specific trauma conditions.

Her post can be summarised:

"If you don't come out of this with a new skill, you never lacked time, you lacked discipline. This cultural obsession with [capitalistic] 'productivity' and always spending time in a 'productive,' 'fruitful' way is absolutely maddening.

What we need is more self-compassion, more gentle acceptance of all the difficult emotions coming up for us now, more focus on gentle ways to soothe ourselves and our pain and the pain of loved ones around us,.....making us feel worse about ourselves in the name of 'motivation.'"

I can align myself with Alaa Hijazi's post, and do recognise the need to gently accept ourselves, accept our current emotions and not to focus too much on being obsessively productive. This is a period of reflection, almost like a personal stock take, and it can be an ideal time to recognise our progress in life, rather than denigrate all our achievements by wanting the elusive 'more' and 'better' life scenarios.

But, I for one, do still see this Lockdown time as an opportunity to develop and grow ourselves, as long as we are balanced in how we use this time.

We must be wary that there is a **mental health caveat** that is beginning to rear its head and it's something many of us must be careful of.

For me, this mental health caveat presents itself in terms of panic attacks. After almost 3 years of being panic attack free, I am now presenting with classic panic attack symptoms of racing and erratic pulse, breathlessness and an internal dialogue pressure to improve myself.

This is a direct result of having Lockdown time to 'forge ahead of the learning curve' with personal and professional projects. So, I am learning now, even at nearly 60 years of age, to adopt a more balanced approach to this unique time. I still set daily goals, but am philosophical if I don't achieve them. I don't proverbially 'beat myself up' and simply accept that was how it went today. Examples of this balanced approach can be seen in my exercise routines which until recently, had been done almost regimentally in terms of duration, frequency and intensity. I am now working to understand how I feel each day, happily changing my exercise formula, and dare I say it, even taking days off! This has taken the pressure off myself emotionally, and I feel a new sense of freedom, empowerment and control.

In terms of my business goals, I am only now beginning to realise that a constant push-push attitude almost inevitably results in feelings of frustration which feeds my internal anxiety, which for me, ultimately leads to panic attack symptoms.

The term resilience, commonly known as not giving up, is often banded around at times of pressure and manifests itself in terms of statements such as 'when the going gets tough the tough get going'... 'man up'... 'pain now, glory later.' However, maybe a more holistic understanding of resilience is to be adaptable, to work out what works for you, to maybe step back before you step forward.

I take comfort from other social media commentators, such as Lancashire Post Media Editor Blaise Tapp, who recognise that having more time does not mean that you are more productive – in fact, it can mean the exact opposite! Just by accepting this statement takes the guilt away for me.

Even potentially more worrying, is the impact of parental well-meaning educational expectation and pressure on children to learn at home. We must keep balancing the opportunity to learn with the complementary viewpoint of being creative, trying new things and having plenty of fun.

In conclusion, it really is about balance. Recognise the obvious and subtle pressure of Lockdown time, don't push too hard for too long, take regular

personal and professional stock takes, and develop routines that have flexibility built into them. Remember resilience is a double edged sword.

If you can do this, then why not use your time to set your own gentler expectations for developing yourself personally and professionally?

#lep #blaisetapp #mhfa #mentalhealth #granadatv #bbc

Ross McWilliam

BA Hons, MSc, PGCE, CMI Level 7 Coach, MHFA England Instructor Member