



Week 7 – Walking Your Way to Happiness – Building Your Resilience

“When we spend most of our time at work or thinking about it even when we're not physically in the workspace, our levels of cortisol - the stress hormone – are raised. Stress levels that are permanently high lead to poor decision-making, lack of perspective, impatience and anxiety, depression and addiction (to our own adrenaline, which is also elevated in times of stress, as well as external elements, such as drink or drugs), mental illness ...the list goes on. We find ourselves in constant 'fight, flight or freeze' mode, our bodies desperately scramble to catch up with the unrelenting stress we're putting ourselves through. We lose all sense of personal boundaries and we completely forget that we as human animals need nurturing.

In-short we've abandoned ourselves and, in my experience, the worst trauma occurs not when we are abandoned by others but when we abandon ourselves.

How do you think you might have abandoned yourself? Perhaps by no longer doing a hobby are used to enjoy or by not spending time with people who aren't associated with your work? Maybe you've abandoned yourself to overeating, by drinking alcohol to excess or by getting involved in toxic relationships or simply by working too hard for too long. Take a moment now to consider the areas in your life in which personal abandonment could be happening.

By highlighting these areas, hopefully you'll see where your life may have become unmanageable. It's important to note that a lack of manageability, plus the loss of personal boundaries and the inability to say 'No' or Stop' can create indecisiveness, insecurity and stress in day-to-day life. And if you're stressed for prolonged periods of time, you lose personal clarity and end up feeling trapped and powerless. Rediscovering personal clarity and honesty, plus learning how to manage the factors that can cause stress, are the key drivers behind my book 'walk with your wolf'” – **Jonathan Hoban (Author, Psychotherapist & Walking Therapist)**

We've seen what the dangers of frequently raised cortisol and adrenaline levels are. But there is an antidote: oxytocin. Sometimes known as the 'love drug', because it is associated with mother baby bonding, touch, intimacy, smiling, laughing and many other ways of feeling good (including walking), oxytocin is released when we walk, along with endorphins, and almost immediately we feel the benefits as the hormones rush around the body. In fact, a 2015 study carried out at the Stamford Woods Institute for the Environment in California found that people who walked for 90 minutes in a natural area showed decreased activity in the region of the brain related to a key factor in depression. So, moving in nature makes us feel good and acts as a de-stressor, allowing us the time and space to process thoughts and feelings, as well as enabling us to think clearly.

Walking is often a natural, instinctive solution to a pressing problem. How many of us have said, that's it I'm going for a walk! When we are faced with conflict or a difficult decision to make? How many of us come back with a solution, or at least something approaching clarity?

Can walking really solve all your problems?

As I've said, we're not talking about a quick fix. You might walk to the supermarket and back, but that isn't really going to solve anything. You have to move - really move. I'm not suggesting a hike to the top of the nearest mountain (well, not yet), but if you really want to get your brain activity flowing, you do need to get out there, in all weathers, and immerse yourself in the experience of walking in nature.

When you decide to go for a walk, you're also making adequate time in your busy life to process your thoughts and feelings. Becoming consciously aware of how you're feeling before, during and after each walk can help you get used to naming how you feel. This naming of feelings (for example, I feel happy, I feel anxious, I feel sad) helps your brain and body to manage your thoughts and emotions more effectively.

Identifying and naming emotions can also help to externalise feelings that you often internalise without knowing or choose not to share out of fear of feeling vulnerable and exposed. Finding a voice to name and make explicit emotions you experience, both to yourself and others, expands your emotional vocabulary and awareness, improves confidence and self-esteem, alleviates emotional and physical stress and provides you with a much-needed feeling of release and relief. There is no shame in naming your feelings, but it may take some getting used to it if it's not something you already do.

When you're moving physically you start to think with much more clarity; and when you're walking through nature, you are re-forging a spiritual and emotional connection to nature that you've allowed yourself to lose.

Step 1: Set a date that you are going to get out there in nature. Ideally go on your own to get the full benefits. If you work in London, there are lots of green spaces you can find.

Step 2: Take a pen and paper with you. At the beginning of the walk note down how you feel emotionally, bring your awareness to it without judging yourself.

Step 3: Turn off all technology, so you cannot be contacted. Boundary this time for yourself.

Step 4: Get walking, if you're feeling stressed set a good pace to begin with.

Step 5: Walk mindfully, notice the colours, sounds, nature, wind, rain, sun.

Step 6: At the end of your walk, note down how you feel emotionally now, bring awareness to it without judging yourself.