

Turn Pain to Joy

Change your thinking and serve.



by Howard L. Millman

MOST PSYCHOLOGICAL PAIN is unnecessary, yet you likely experience negative feelings that interfere with your productivity, morale, and well-being. You experience some frustration, anxiety, anger, and worry, often leading to physical symptoms such as back pain, headaches, stomach problems, and tension. Mind and body are inseparable. A healthier mind and body leads to personal happiness, less sickness and down time, and more creativity in solving problems.

While overcoming problems is good, being resilient, creative, and joyful is better and prevents further problems. When you experience less pain and more joy, your life, work, and service become more satisfying and productive.

1. Change thinking. You can change your thinking through cognitive restructuring, reframing, and rational emotive therapy. *Rational* means the ability to reason logically. Amazingly, you may fail to apply rational thinking to your psychological pain. It's as if you are convinced that worry and anxiety are inevitable. "My pain will never go away. I won't be able to do my favorite things. How can I not be worried or depressed?" Does worry help any situation? The rational answer is "no." Yet, the worry may haunt you until the situation gets resolved. It is the *perception* that causes worry and depression, not the events. If you are consumed by "office politics," you worry about perceived negative comments and reactions from others. Rationally, you should be aware of others' reactions, interact in a friendly manner, gain competency, strengthen your job skills, and increase your value.

Perception can be changed! "Worry never helps. I'll focus on being a positive force for myself and others." Reality is what it is. Anxiety doesn't change reality. "If the worst happens, I'll do my best." The key is to recognize and then change negative thoughts and attitudes, such as jumping to conclusions, exaggerating, and catastrophizing. You are rewriting your internal script. Negative thinking usually leads to negative emotions, such as anger, guilt, frustration, fear, sadness, and anxiety. These emotions often cause fatigue, irritability, tension or pain, and lead to addictions.

2. Being here. Focus on being in the moment. Let go of destructive thoughts and worries. Substitute new perceptions that counteract pain and negativity. Stress reduction begins, and creativity is unleashed. No painful past, no worrisome future—just the immediate experience of being here. Accepting reality means that events happen, whether we like them or not. Fighting reality hurts; acceptance leads to tranquility.

3. Focus, flex and let go. *Focus, flex, and let go* is a way to counteract tension and physical pain and to feel better emotionally. So, *focus* on *specific* body pain, *flex* muscles, and *let go* of pain and tension. Know about your pain, focus on the cause, and let go of wor-

ries. Acceptance can be an antidote. When you accept reality, you weaken the intensity of negative sensations. Holding on increases pain, worry, and anger; letting go lightens burdens and is freeing.

4. Joy. A transforming experience occurs when your mind and body feel good, and you realize that there are no obstacles to diminishing pain and experiencing joy. Your competence leads to joy—the feeling of pleasure, happiness, and satisfaction. Accepting and enjoying each moment and being creative and productive become natural. **PE**

Howard L. Millman, Ph.D., is a clinical and consulting psychologist. Email hlmphd@paintojoy.com.

ACTION: Learn to turn pain into joy.