

A sense of calm is important for us all

by MARK PAVILONS

We're all familiar with Winston Churchill's oft-copied sentiment "stay calm and carry on."

In fact, we now see various iterations of it on our shirts and coffee mugs, almost like a call to action.

Humans have been burdened by stress since the dawn of time and yes, my friends, that will be our undoing. The strange thing about this is we all know that stress is bad for us in so many ways, and yet we continue to feed it, like a stray cat at our doorstep.

A calm mind allows us to "bloom," according to the Dalai Lama, and van Gogh pointed out there's calm in every storm. LL Cool J was quite right in asserting "when adversity strikes, that's when you have to be the most calm. Take a step back, stay strong, stay grounded and press on."

I've been surrounded by a sense of calm lately, odd given my circumstances.

I've been traditionally a little hyper, maybe tense or even stressed.

A recent visit to my reiki practitioner revealed a noticeable sense of calm, something she's never felt before. Even my chakras, typically closed at the outset of every session, were surprisingly open and receptive.

Again, where did this come from?

Well, I have been trying to self-calm lately, taking time for prayer, meditation, even playing "healing tunes" on Spotify at work.

In recent years, I've been searching for a few things and a sense of calm and self-centredness were two of them. I'd also love to find deeper understanding and, well, the meaning of life. But perhaps that's a life-long learning experience. Too bad these things aren't taught in school at a young age.

I think when we come across a person that exudes serenity, we become a bit jealous or envious. We grin and maybe even scratch our heads a little at the fact they've found their calm spot.

We in North America have yet to grasp, and adopt, a European sense of enjoying every day as it comes. Our friends across the sea still enjoy regular family dinners, even strolls and afternoon siestas.

All of these help ease our burdens and take the weight off our shoulders, even for a short time.

But we over-achieving North Americans dodge chaos and strong winds every day. We thrive on it. We get through the day on caffeine and adrenaline.

Most of us know a large percentage of workers are burned out, especially in fields like health care. Companies, small and large, are recognizing workplace stress and employees' mental health.

Humans, according to academics, were never meant to experience stress on a daily basis. That was reserved for the final moments. We engaged in fight and flight responses to danger, but this mechanism now seems to be working overtime, 24/7 for some of us.

This physical and mental reaction impacts our bodies, emotions, intelligence and decision making.

Research suggests that reducing this and injecting calmness into our lives will give us more energy, attention and creativity.

When we're calmer, we literally see more things. We notice both things and people around and we are much more aware.

When we're calm, we also manage energy because we're not running in overdrive.

Research also suggests that our most creative ideas come in moments when we're not actively focused or stressed. We are most creative when our brain is in alpha wave mode, which is a relaxed state of mind.

Let's face it, friends, life can be hard. In fact, every day brings new challenges. It's often said it's how we react to stressful or traumatic situations that matters. And that's true. But here's something else to consider. People say it's the struggles, traumas and illness that make us strong. No, these things make us weak and afraid. It's the fight for survival, the perseverance, the love, that make us stronger.

And yes, we frail humans are a resilient lot. It's amazing how we can 'bounce back' from horrible, life-changing events and carry on. Suffering seldom makes you stronger. But it can make you more aware, more compassionate, more sensitive to others. And these are very good qualities indeed.

My son made an interesting observation recently. He noted that humans should be in tune or in sync with everything else on the planet - the flora and fauna. Our ancestors likely were, and our Indigenous brethren are, too. So, when did we lose this ability, this harmony with nature? What would happen if we got it back?

Very good questions. How would we benefit by allowing the calmness of each wave of life gently wash us up the shore?

I'd love to find out.

Some King residents have found it, whether through walks along numerous hiking trails, some outdoor painting, street fairs and events. That sense of community we enjoy in King is priceless. Composure, patience, tranquility, peace. We should carry these in our pockets, right next to our cell phones.

I was never a big fan of those trite quotes, silly sentiments or photos of cats just 'hanging in there.'

But I will say there's a pinch of truth in all of them. Quietening the mind and reducing anxiety and worry are paramount these days.

There are many ways to achieve this - from yoga and meditation to deep breathing and walks in the forests.

A colleague and good friend of mine died of a heart attack at 60. He was in good shape and good spirits, but was stressed at work.

Stress shouldn't be the reason we leave this planet. It shouldn't dominate our hearts, minds and bodies.

I am trying to manage my stress, blood pressure and anxiety. They're all being put to the test lately.

But now my sense of calm is no longer an ideal, but a feeling, a constant companion. It's my job to exercise this positivity so it becomes stronger and chases my demons away.

I think I can do it.

We can't tell from looking at people what burdens they carry.

Smile at strangers, spread peace and carry on!