



Work Life Journey - The Power of Memories

February 2021

Wow, what a month...smile, we made it! We were all affected throughout the state by the winter storm. Most of us continued functioning without power and water and limited to no access to the Internet. In spite of Texas not being well equipped for that kind of weather event, we persevered and there has been lots of activity as we all get back to our normal routines. In the rush to restock food, batteries, and bottled water, I am reminded to pause and reflect --- to remember the thousands of people who worked through long, cold days and nights trying to keep us safe or worked in those hospitals, pharmacies, stores and businesses that remained open. My thoughts also go out to those who are dealing with one crisis situation after another. We're reminded of real life heroes within our friend groups, co-workers and families. Don't forget to thank those around you.

At the same time we cannot forget that we were already battling COVID-19 on many fronts including helping family members, providing and getting vaccinations and supporting colleagues and friends. Our tenacity, teamwork and resilience has shown through in many ways:

- We've honed in on the ability to assimilate new information quickly in order to make sense of new circumstances.
- You can high five yourself for the furthering of behavioral capabilities such as tolerance for uncertainty and the ability to cooperate and work within teams.
- We can also recognize the refining of skills in regulating emotions as well as building social networks of trusted colleagues.

These skills contribute positively to the ability to withstand shocks. As this period has been one of extreme uncertainty and challenge, I'd like to suggest one more skill to help us navigate and foster resilience – The Power of Memories.

Lately, I've been thinking a lot lately about the power of positive memories. The effects of the pandemic may last much longer than we ever anticipated and the meaning of a "new normal" is different for each person, but one thing that has sustained me during

this time is remembering the good times I have had with my family in the past. Remembering specific good times is not just a fun pastime, but there's scientific evidence that it can really make a difference in your mood and attitude. A 2017 paper by Megan Speer and Mauricio Delgado explains that recalling positive memories reduces biological stress indicators and negative feelings and activates parts of the brain involved in "reward-processing and emotional regulation." Researchers found that several areas of the brain's prefrontal cortex — areas involved in emotion regulation and "cognitive control" — became more active when people recalled positive memories. Thinking about happier times seems to interrupt the cascade of negative thoughts and feelings. In other words, "Self-generated positive emotions via memory recall in the face of stress" were shown to have a "restorative and protective" effect. Additional research has shown that the emotional quality of a memory—whether it is positive or negative—affects the way in which we remember it. Furthermore, literature supports the idea that negative emotions require more thinking and more mental processing than positive ones. What would it look like if we more intentionally processed the positive feelings—small and large—of a day off from work, spent with people we care about most?

Every day we are creating memories for the future either positive or negative. Thinking about our parents, friends, or good experiences, such as trips we have taken or places we have visited fosters positivity. Good memories can make present in our minds and hearts meaning to life that motivates and inspires. During this pandemic, we're spending more time at home which offers a great opportunity to look for special photos and hang them up, or think of songs or stories to connect with positive memories and share them with friends or family who may not know them.

What are some of your happy memories? Of course good memories will be different for each of us. While one person may recall a fun meal out with friends, another may think back on their favorite travel experience. Try taking a minute to think about a specific good memory that you have, really remember the experience, and notice how you feel.

If you don't feel better, don't give up! It's not a magic fix for everything, but you may feel a difference in your overall frame of mind when you take time often to remember good times that you've had. In a week, a month, or a year from now, what will you remember? Consider that your brain is working on that even now. Remembering happy moments in the past may help us feel better and move forward to face the future.