

The Patience Zone

***When this old world starts a getting me down
And people are just too much for me to face
I'll climb way up to the top of the stairs
And all my cares just drift right into space...***

The lyrics from the Gerry Goffin and Carole King song **Up On the Roof** sound like the perfect solution for life's everyday frustrations. Unfortunately, we often don't have a roof available when we need it.

I'm talking about "everyday frustrations" not about the big things in life like a family crisis, job loss, or health issues but the day-to-day little things that bug us, get on our nerves, or make us crazy. In the scheme of things they appear small but when they turn an otherwise good day into a downer, they affect our life in a negative way. I don't believe that anyone escapes them. I do believe that some of us handle them better than others.

Everyday frustrations like...you're third in the supermarket check-out line when you hear those dreaded words, "Price check at register three." And you look up to see that you are at register three. Or everything is going smoothly until the person in front of you pulls out what looks like a hundred coupons and the cashier has to make sure she reads the fine print in each one of them.

Or what about traffic jams. It's not even rush hour, yet there is construction or an accident ahead and you're stuck with no idea of how long the wait will be. You have an appointment or kids to pick-up but there is nothing you can do except wait it out.

And then there is that co-worker who never seems to have anything to do. While you're sweating a big deadline, she stops by your desk to tell you her latest tale of woe. You act busy thinking she'll get the hint but she is clueless not only to your stress but to the fact that if she's not busy, you could surely use her help.

It's a given that most of us live a fast-paced life with too much to do and too little time in which to do it. While we could make choices that would ease this kind of stress, many of us choose not to. Even those of us who are naturally quite patient have our moments when things get to us. So how do we deal with these little, or sometimes big, frustrations without pulling our hair out, raising our blood pressure, or getting into a crabby mood?

When I don't have a roof handy, I go to a place I call ***The Patience Zone***. I get there in a variety of different ways depending upon the intensity of the situation. I hang out there until my frustrations have passed or the wait is over. As you may have guessed, The Patience Zone is in my head. I'm sure you have one too. It just takes a conscious decision to go there.

The first step in this decision is to figure out whether the situation is worth getting all steamed up about. If you are in a predicament where there is nothing you can do, i.e., traffic or waiting in

line, you will be healthier and happier if you choose the zone. There are many ways to get there, the key is to find one that works for you and then practice it until you perfect your technique.

Here are some ways you can get into ***The Patience Zone***:

Breathe

The old adage about taking a deep breath really works! Breathe in through your nose and exhale out your mouth. Concentrate on doing it slowly and evenly, taking in refreshing, relaxing air and letting out tension and frustrations with each exhale. Conscious breathing is relaxing and healthy. When you are paying attention to your breathing you are not focusing on what is bugging you.

Put in Imaginary Earplugs

Others can often increase your frustrations, especially if they are complaining while waiting in line or about a slow server in a restaurant. Don't let these people suck you into exaggerating the experience with their negativity. If you can't tune them out, take the opposite point of view. Comment on how nice it is to get to spend more time together or show some compassion for the overworked and stressed clerk. Say it with a smile on your face and a lightness to your voice. If they continue with their griping, move on to another way to get into the zone.

It Could Be Worse

Tell yourself it could be worse and then come up with ways it could. Keep your thoughts on the funny side. If you're stuck in traffic by yourself, it could be worse if someone you don't like was in the car with you or if you had a backseat full of cranky kids. If people are talking loudly in a movie theatre, it could be worse if they had seen the movie and were saying the lines before the actors. Note: The funnier the "it could be worse" scenario the better.

Music

You may not be in a position to listen to a CD or turn on the radio but you can have a selection of songs in your head that you can start playing when you need to enter the zone. The songs should be upbeat with words that you know. I use "Feelin' Groovy" by Simon and Garfunkel or "Life's a Dance" by Steve Winwood. Depending upon where I am, I may sing out loud or just sing to myself.

Your Own Patience Meter

Imagine a meter, a thermometer, or a gauge. Assign one end to be your "totally tense" place and the other your Patience Zone. Picture the needle or mercury moving from tense to patient and use all your strength to keep it in the zone you want to be. If you're in the car, you can even look at the temperature gauge on the dashboard and imagine yourself in the cold section rather than the hot.

Mantra or Affirmation

Use a mantra like "This too shall pass." or an affirmation like "I am calm and serene." Saying mantras or affirmations over and over in your head can take you past the frustration and into the zone. You may have to keep repeating it, concentrating on every word, while in the zone. If your mind wanders back to whatever is bothering you, choose a fresh mantra or affirmation.

Your Comfort Place

Imagine a place that you love. It could be outside or inside. Use that vision to move into and stay in the zone. Be sure to use all your senses; smell, sight, hearing, touch, even taste to make the picture more real. Dealing with a grumpy co-worker? Imagine lying on the beach. Waiting on hold? Imagine a walk in a beautiful meadow. You can be creative and visit many places or keep going back to the one that works.

The best part of being in your Patience Zone is that the more you get yourself there, the easier it is to go. Sometimes, I just have to think “zone” and I relax. I can feel my muscles releasing and my mood lighten. Practice helps and fortunately or unfortunately, most of us have plenty of opportunities to practice the skill of getting to and remaining in our Patience Zone.