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Living with Uncertainty

In this video, I'd like to talk about a concept that's very familiar for all of us, and in fact, it might be on the minds of most of us during this pandemic. And that's the concept of uncertainty.

In my recent work with clients, I've had a lot of discussions around the unknowns.— People are genuinely afraid if they will lose their jobs, they are worried about whether they or their family members will get sick, they are not sure how it will look when their child goes back to school or daycare; everyone is wondering when the COVID vaccine will come out.

These are all valid questions to wonder about, but the fact that we don't have answers to them readily can create a lot of fear, worry, and anxiety amongst us.

It's no surprise that Our human brain does not like uncertainty; In fact, people are much better able to tolerate pain compared to uncertainty.—For example, you might have had a friend come up to you and ask if you want to know the good news or bad news first — we may lean on wanting to know the bad news first

- even though we know it's going to be more painful, we prefer knowing

All human beings inevitably will go through certain life experiences— such as our own death, loss of a loved one, difficulties in relationships or jobs. At some level, consciously or unconsciously, we are aware that these things will happen. But what we don't know is how and when these things will play out. And that's the part where we can find ourselves creating a lot of "what-if" scenarios that can't necessarily be helpful, and they may or may not even come true.

So, it's important to recognize that we will always be faced with unknowns, and for us to figure out how we can create increase our tolerance for uncertainty ---whether it's during this pandemic or beyond.

So, I'd like to share some strategies that can help us tolerate uncertainty at this time. To make these easy to remember, I call them the "5 R's".

1. **RECOGNIZE:** This is really about recognizing that certain things are not in our control, and being aware of the feelings that we are experiencing (that might be anxiety, fear, worry, sadness). Labeling our inner experience alone can reverse those intense feelings because our brains feel more calm when it can have a name to our experience. It also helps us accept the reality that certain things are out of our control and let go.
2. **REASONABLE CONTROL:** Focus on the things that you can actually control-; set a routine for the day; engage in safety precautions, taking care of your sleep, diet, exercise, how much news you are consuming right now; how many happy hour calls you do with friends and colleagues.



3. REFLECT – Our minds have a tendency to overestimate threats, and underestimate our ability to handle it. This type of thought pattern can reinforce feelings of fear. The reality is that all of us have constantly faced uncertainty or setbacks in life. Human beings are highly resilient even in the most adverse situations, so identify how you might have overcome or even just tolerated uncertainty in the past. Tapping into those moments can reinforce feelings of courage and help us gain a healthy sense of control during difficult times.
4. REASONABLE RESTRAINT: Given that so much is uncertain, you may not want to take risks that you would in normal circumstances. Someone wise once said, “confidence without clarity is a disaster.” One must practice caution in a measured way. Be more conservative in making financial decision. Hold off on expensive purchases if it’s not necessary. If you have extra income, you may consider putting a little extra in your savings.
5. RE-IMAGINE: This is a new context we are living in, and it’s likely that our new normal will look different from before. So, it’s a good time to re-imagine new possibilities in your personal, professional, social life in this new context. Maybe you want to develop a new skill like learning to play an instrument, learn a new language; revamping our business model; or connect with old friends/family, grow a garden; volunteer; complete pending projects.

I hope you can use these 5 strategies to help you get through this wave of uncertainty.