

# Don't Worry, Be Happy!



Picture courtesy of Openphoto

My grandfather on my father's side was a wonderful man. He was one of those rare people that genuinely didn't worry. He was filled with a sense of playfulness and joy that was infectious. His favourite tune was 'Don't Worry, Be Happy' by Bob Marley, a song which seemed to sum up his life perfectly.

Unfortunately for me I didn't inherit this trait from him, with worry invading my life far too often. Concern for the future and a constant urge to play out possible scenarios of what might happen, should things go wrong, both stole my joy from the present moment and led to ever increasing stress levels.

But how could I possibly combat worry when so much of life is uncertain? In treatment I learnt that worry is a response to a very natural desire to control our life circumstances. Subconsciously we think that if we ruminate and play out all the possible scenarios in our heads, we might also think of solutions and how to react should certain things happen. In an ideal world this would be true, worry would prompt us to problem solve – but if left unchecked it can lead us to catastrophise, causing us to get more and more concerned whilst not really solving anything at all.

Whilst in class I discovered what I now know as 'The Worry Chart', a handy way to decipher whether worrying is constructive (an opportunity to problem solve, for example) or destructive (catastrophising, an opportunity for us to let go of concern).

Think of this chart as your compass, faithfully pointing you in the right direction so you remain healthy and happy. I suggest writing this chart in the back of your diary or somewhere close by so you can refer to it whenever you are worried. It is an invaluable tool to help you discover whether you are in danger of destructive and senseless worrying.

## WORRY CHART

### ***Is it happening now?***

Yes – go to next question

No – let it go

### ***Is it resolvable?***

Yes – go to next question

No – let it go

**Can I resolve it?**

Yes – begin brainstorming and problem solving

No – go to next question

**Can anyone else resolve it?**

Yes – plan how to approach them and ask for their help

(TIP: have a clear idea of the outcome you desire once the problem is resolved)

No – let it go

**So you need to let go of whatever is worrying you – but how?**

If you worry a lot it's very likely someone has told you before to just stop worrying or 'let it go'. Whenever people have said this to me in the past I have felt like saying "Wow – why didn't I think of that?!" After all, if it were that easy everyone would be doing it. In the end I did find that there were steps I could take to aid the process, enabling me to finally let go of worry. I tried many things and, through much trial and error, I discovered these three steps which made it possible to make worrying a thing of the past (or at the very least, short lived!). These steps can be used by anyone who knows that they are worrying about something that they cannot control and need to let go of.

**Step One: Distract Yourself**

One of the best ways to stop worrying in its tracks is to distract yourself. Exercising, starting a project, doing arts and crafts or even reading a good book are all good options – do whatever activity demands your undivided attention. Of course this is not a long term solution but it is a start! It serves to jolt your mind out of rumination and causes your focus to shift, a very positive step indeed.

Some of the activities I have distracted myself with in the past are:

- Dancing
- Going to a fancy dress party
- Organising a night out (or in) with friends
- Reading a good book
- Watching TV or a DVD
- Going to the cinema
- Going on a date or going to a speed dating event
- Calling a friend or seeing them and not talking about your worries
- Work
- Arts and crafts
- Writing
- Doing something fun that you have never tried before (E.g. Going Clay Shooting or to an Exhibition)
- Booking a place on an interesting course (E.g. Photography or Cooking Classes)

**Step Two: Focus on the Task at Hand**

Generally when we tend to worry we release adrenaline, become hyper and go into overdrive, trying to do everything at once. Trying to do too many things at once will only make us more hyper and stressed and, ultimately, much less effective. Indeed, rather than speed up, we need to do the opposite and *slow down*.

Focus on one thing at a time and take your time with each individual task. Thinking about the broader picture will only serve to overwhelm you at this point, so instead, just concentrate on the piece of the puzzle you have in your hand at this moment in time. What if the piece of the puzzle is too big? Then all you need to do is break it down into smaller parts, until what you have in front of you seems manageable.

### **Step Three: Let Go of What You Think Should Happen**

A big part of letting go is releasing what you think should happen. Try to accept that there are no should's and no should not's in life. Things don't always go as planned and that doesn't necessarily make the outcome wrong, it just makes it different.

I firmly believe that even the worst times in my life – times when I would have given anything for things to be different – were providing me with some of the most valuable lessons I've learnt so far. In these moments life may seem unfair or unjust, but it is important to trust that one day you will, at the very least, be able to look back and see the importance of what the experience taught you along the way.

Thus, no path or outcome is wrong or simply 'shouldn't happen', as every experience provides us with different benefits, whether it is a lesson or a blessing. Trust and have faith that ultimately things will work out for your greater good, even though it may not seem that way right now.

Although I still sometimes find myself drifting into worrying, I like to think that I am following in my grandfather's footsteps more now. I distract myself when I need to, take things one step at a time and I have faith that there are no wrong outcomes. I genuinely believe that things are working out in exactly the way they need to - either to help foster my growth and learning, or to serve as a blessing.

I have released my desire to control things which are beyond my control and have become more care free as a result. I am now finding a whole new dimension to the song my grandfather introduced me to all those years ago. You too can enjoy this lighter way of living, all you need to do is follow the steps and 'don't worry, be happy'.