

HEALTH AND FITNESS

Changing times

How are we coping?

Mark Shields takes a closer look.

Mark W Shields
Managing Director
Channel Islands Life centre
Trainers of life coaching and NLP.

Tel: 01462 451473 Head Office UK
www.channelislandslifecentre.com

Mortgage rates are up, electricity, gas and oil bills are up, weekly food shop has increased by 30% when will it stop? The Western world has had it really good for a while but now other nations want a part of it which is raising prices at a colossal rate.

It is hard to turn on the television these days or pick up a newspaper without watching or reading about climate change, recession, and redundancies. After a while it can become quite depressing and you would not be blamed for thinking what is the point of it all.

Stress statistics are at their most frightening with 1.2 million people in the UK currently off work with stress related disorders. This figure is currently greater than the UK's unemployment figures. This is increasing all the time and by the year 2010 stress is forecast to carry the biggest health risk and have the largest contributing negative impact on health and business in the UK.

In fact it is so serious the UK government have dedicated some £170 million pounds to recruit another 3000 cognitive behavioural therapists to help deal with the rising mental health and stress cases.

Embracing the change

The year is 2008 and life as we know it is about to change as the world goes through an economic down turn but all is not lost.

There is a positive message in this panic and confusion which is simply that we can live a great life despite all the changes because we can embrace the changes and move with them.

Swimming against the current is never easy so why bother. Okay, so the path ahead is unknown and we don't know where it leads to but how exciting that is! New adventures, new experiences, at least we can say that life is not boring.

History has proved that what goes up must come down and that things always take a turn for the better. Just because we are having to live through a period of time that could make us go without things to which we have become accustomed, this does not mean it has to be a negative situation.

Think about it. We never used to have a mobile phone, iPod player, plasma TV, microwave meals, 2 cars per family, Nintendo game consoles, 3 international holidays a year, a TV in every room so why do we think these are necessities for living.

As parents there never used to be the excessive choice of after school clubs and activities available for children that there is today nor the competitiveness between parents of how many a child attended per week. We want to give our children

everything we did not have because we think it will make them more rounded individuals.

As children was it so bad that we played in the street or fields after school or went to youth club once a week?

Well it's about cultural change and we have grown into accepting this lifestyle and have become accustomed to it. I am not saying lets ditch the phones and expensive technology but it is certainly worth thinking of other ways in which we can enjoy life that does not involve huge funds.

So how do we embrace these changes?

Some of you may remember the sitcom "The Good Life" in the 70's and 80's well I certainly do as my parents were just like The Good's living off the land and cultivating their own fruit and vegetables. Nothing went to waste and they always lived comfortably.

I will always remember my Dad saying "take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves". I never really truly believed in that philosophy but that was probably due to the fact that my generation has been brought up learning about new technology and the world of convenience. If it isn't quick and now then it's not worth waiting for. However, as I have grown older this attitude has changed.

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Surely the most important thing in all our lives is our wellbeing and how we feel every day. Some of you may have forgotten or lost sight of that. The key to all this madness is to ensure that you keep perspective on what is important. If you find yourselves living a life that is not aligned to your integral wants, needs, values, or beliefs, then have the confidence to make the change. It's never too late.

Take yourself out of the race. Lose the desire to keep up with the Joneses'. Look at your life as a learning curve. Each day you wake up ask yourself "what am I going to learn today"? Enjoy the experience of life rather than rushing around constantly trying to get to the next level. Enjoy the level you are already at.

A great idea is to sit down as a family and rework your short, medium and long term plans. A very popular strategy seems to be to cut your social spending by half and build a capital nest egg or emergency fund in order to ensure you have some financial security during such a volatile and unstable time. This makes you feel better immediately and enables you to relax and enjoy life more.

You would be amazed how much you can save and actually live on each month if you really put your mind to it.

Do we all really need two cars, new clothes every week, every new DVD that hits the shops, expensive meals out, the list is endless. Try it for three months and see how you feel. The worse case scenario is you will end up where you started.

Top Five tips on where to save money.

Scroll through your monthly bank statement and using two separate colours highlight the items that are a necessity or a luxury. For the next three months try living without the luxury.

If you use a car try cutting out unnecessary trips. If one of your luxuries was to stop your gym membership then walking/cycling to work would be a far cheaper alternative. Alternatively, car-share with a friend or neighbour.

Buy what you need. When buying food we end up throwing away about 30% of what

we have purchased. This is such a waste of money. Plan your food for the week and try to stick to the plan. Only buy what is on your list and look out for the BOGOF (buy one get one free) offers, particularly ones that can be frozen and eaten at a later date.

To save on your electricity bills, turn off unnecessary lights and try not to leave appliances on stand by. In winter ditch the electric blanket and use a hot water bottle. Household bills are unavoidable but we can economise substantially it just takes a little more effort.

Social life is still important and you can continue to enjoy a good time with friends without going into the red. Everyone will be feeling the pinch so suggesting a picnic on the beach and volleyball during the summer months whereby everyone chips in can work well. Also, the cinema offers a half price viewing on a set night each week.

Changes that reward us.

With 100,000 tonnes of waste produced in Jersey each year there are numerous ways in which to reduce this waste and it will save us money too. As the saying goes "one man's junk is another man's treasure" as this is true when you see the number of car boot sales and salvage fairs that are cropping up across the UK. France has had the right idea for years with their "brocante" street fairs.

Here in Jersey we have a super system available to islanders known as "ecycle" (www.thisisjersey.co.uk/ecycle). This system works so easily whereby you can advertise online for free anything that you no longer wish to keep or can be bothered to take to the dump. I had a garden gazebo whereby the structural poles had broken but the canopy remained in tact. I recycled it to a very happy gentleman who had a need for the waterproof material.

Yuppies are the new "cluckies"

Yes, more and more people are keeping chickens as pets than ever before, particularly city dwellers. Some chicken farms are completely sold out of stock with a 3 month waiting list.

The main reason for this appears to be that people are enjoying getting back to basics and living the "good life". Apart from being an enjoyable hobby, retrieving a freshly laid organic egg every morning is so rewarding. However, there is no financial advantage in keeping chickens as feeding the birds can be costly but if you are treating the exercise as a hobby then it is certainly cheaper than keeping a dog or cat.

Grow your own

Another change that is taking place is the interest in growing your own vegetables. The waiting list for allotments has trebled in the past couple of years and the demand for these private pieces of earth has increased beyond recognition. Organic vegetables seem to be the popular choice at the moment with sales far exceeding those of the non organic kind.

You don't have to have a large garden. A window box can easily grow lettuces and with a couple of grow bags outside your back door you will soon be enjoying the fruits of your labour straight off the vine.

Wellbeing is priority

Recently, a Chartered Management Institute survey has found that Managers who are working in particularly difficult industries are not taking their allocation of holiday. The reason for this is fear of missing out on business opportunities or showing their employers that they are less committed.

This behaviour is ludicrous as in the long run by not giving yourself a break you are in fact overloading your body to the max and at some point it will break down just like a car would if you had never had it serviced.

My advice is not to lose sight of what is important. Our health and wellbeing are our priority. Waking up feeling good every morning is priceless and cannot be compromised. Embrace the changes, go with the flow, enjoy and embrace this new way of life and get from it what you can. I go back to my old saying. "If you always do what you've always done you'll always get what you've always got." Try something new today you may just enjoy it.

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