

## Thoughts on Worrying

By Michael H. Ballard

### Worrying versus: Thinking : Taking Action

**Worrying is essentially repeated and needless analysis.** A never-ending spiral of negatively expended energy driving us further and further - and faster and faster - into the land of Oh-Oh!...Oh-No!...Lookout!...How-can-this-be?!...

I'll never be able to make it!!!!

**Mindless Worry** seriously depletes our mental and physical energy resources. It saps our vitality, steals our creativity and lowers our ability to move forward in life. For some people, Worry is such a habit that it becomes a way of life.

### Is there a difference between Healthy Reflection and Unhealthy, Mindless Worry?

Yes...

Healthy Reflection leads to constructive action. You make a plan, i.e., you set up a cash reserve; *or*, you assemble a group of friends and experts to help you out... etc.

Unhealthy Worry does just the opposite. Worry paralyzes you. You lose sleep *or* wake up in the middle of the night, toss and turn and you don't take action.

### How can you tell if you worry too much?

Ask yourself these questions:

Do I worry more than my friends?

What do I do with my worry?

Does worry "jump start" me into action?

or...

Do I often get sick? Do I get back pain, headaches, stomach aches... etc.

Do I under achieve?

Do I not get enough sleep? Sleep poorly?

If so, then my worrying is unhealthy worry and it's toxic!

## **Can worry be dangerous?**

Yes...

Chronic worry is associated with:

- A higher risk of heart attacks
  - Elevated blood pressure
  - Musculoskeletal aches and pains
  - Gastro-intestinal disturbances
  - Ulcers, skin eruptions, eczema, asthma,
  - Respiratory problems,
  - Lack of and or poor sleep
- and ultimately...*
- Dying younger

## **Do many people worry excessively?**

Yes...

One in four people meet the criteria for diagnosable anxiety (Dr. Hallowell - 1998) These people need professional help! If you include the chronic daytime Worriers, then you 're approximately half the population worry excessively.

## **Do people worry more today than folks did in the past?**

Yes...

We all tend to be more disconnected from others than were people in the past! Most of the social structures that were in place in the past have broken down, so people don't feel as connected. And although most people don't feel they're getting enough reassurance, they also don't want to feel like "wimps" and ask for input. So most of us are not getting enough human moments. We are worrying alone more, and that is the worst way to worry. Why? Because we are social beings and so we need input from others in order to maintain our perspective – and reduce our worry!

## **What do we worry about?**

Kids,...money,...job security,...relationships and health. There are also bursts of worries after life events such as a health diagnosis. But the "toxic" worrier can be in the midst of great times...and still find something to worry about.

## **Do men and women worry the same?**

No... Men tend to keep it bottled up, while women will usually talk about their worries.

### **Do children worry differently from adults?**

Yes... Adolescents worry about appearance, their grades and achievement. Younger kids worry about security, robbers, kidnappers.

### **What steps can I take to control my worrying?**

First, never worry alone. This can stop you from slipping into a state of frantic worrying. When you feel that frantic state coming on...pick up the phone, walk over to a friends house, find an ear to bend. Often worrying is based upon lack of information, or misinformation.

Secondly get information. The real facts can go a long way in helping decrease your worry levels.

Third make a plan. Have a conversation with yourself and a friend.

Fourth, take action. Take those crucial first steps.

### **What can I do to reduce worry?**

- Exercise at least three times a week
- Get active at least three times a week
  - social, emotional, physical, intellectual
- Meditation, affirmation, prayer
- Monitor your self-talk
- Meditation
- Yoga

### **When should we seek professional help?**

Most everyday worriers can use the steps outlined above. But if you're using all these steps and you're not getting any better...then you should see a doctor. If you have an anxiety disorder such as obsessive-compulsive disorder or panic attacks, then your need professional treatment!

### **What types of treatment are there?**

Some people gain relief from medication such as Prozac and Zoloft. Other folks learn to cope better through meditation. With these interventions, an individual can become more successful and self-assured rather than skittish and reclusive. For example, a promotion or more successful relationships can result from taking action to reduce worry.

### **Are alternative treatments available?**

Yes... Cognitive behavioral psychotherapy can be effective. It helps you talk to yourself in a way that's more powerful and less negative. It also helps people overcome phobias and anxieties.

### **Can you worry to little?**

It's possible... Some might call that denial!

Convert worrying into thinking. Start by writing your worries down. Rank the issues in order of concern. View thinking as solution generation and as a strategy

#### **Pace Yourself**

- Keep at it until your mind produces the quality thinking you require.
- Get the thinking "tools" you need, i.e., Edward de Bono's books - Six Thinking Hats, Six Action Shoes
- Practice the mental fitness skills that clear and free your mind to think.
- Schedule blocks of uninterrupted time to think!
- Stay focused on relevant topics
- Record, sort, and save your thoughts
- Before you go to bed make use of your subconscious mind

### **Who can do it all?**

Life is a never-ending stream of possible activities, constantly being replenished by family, friends, teachers, managers, subordinates, as well as by your own hopes, dreams, desires, and by the need to stay alive and functioning. You have so much to do and so little time. The choices are often complex and difficult.

### **But everyone wants some of my time!**

Maybe at one and the same time you are a breadwinner, spouse, parent, family member, sports coach, churchgoer, volunteer, club member and politically active citizen. You must juggle the time demands of each of these roles.

When something is important to someone you care for, remind yourself that you live in an interdependent world and this means sharing your time. Sometimes you've got to do what others want you to do. But not always!

### **Doing what we want to do...**

Situations in which we feel other people are making our decisions for us are not uncommon. A parent, a child, a spouse, a manager or friend all may seem to have as much to say about how we spend our time as we do — and sometimes more.

The feeling that we've lost control may be understandable, but the fact is otherwise. Others can only recommend what they think we ought to do. We

and we alone make the final decision. We can either accept or reject the recommendations of others. Of course some decisions involve painful consequences.

Recognize that in every situation there **are** uncontrollable elements. It saves a great deal of time to make a realistic assessment of what these are, and then accept them. However, in most situations the element of free choice is still there. Playing the game of wishing, “If only I were taller, shorter, richer, better looking...” is not a good use of your time.

### **Are you clinging to the past?**

Role adjustments are required whenever there is a major change in your life: going away to college,...changing jobs,...changes in your health,...retiring. You want to make sure that you are making choices that are right for your current, rather than you're past situation.

### **Why is deciding so difficult?**

Although our rational, emotional, physical and spiritual needs must all be satisfied, often they conflict and so cannot always be met at the same time.

Choosing between long-term and short-term goals presents another kind of conflict. Should you spend your time studying to pass that mid-term course exam, or apply for that summer job that will help pay next year's tuition?

We each reach decisions through several different methods.

- Habit
- Demands of Others
- Escapism
- Spur of the moment
- Default
- **Conscious Decisions**

Spur of the moment decisions can be fine. Nor is there anything “wrong” with decisions that come about by default, the demands of others, escapism or habit. But if you are not satisfied with the payoff from these decisions, then more conscious efforts are required. It is tempting, especially in difficult situations, to drift, dream, or drown. But is that really what you want to do? There is an alternative. You can drift, dream, or drown — **or you can decide.**

### **What is the difference between Anxiety and Fear?**

Anxiety has no object of focus, while fear does have an objective focus. For example, if you are afraid to leave your house, then that is anxiety. However, if you are afraid to leave your house because you think a car might hit you, then that is fear.

If one could choose between either fear or anxiety, then Fear would be the

obvious choice. Why? Because fear at least lets you know what to look out for. Once you are aware of what you are afraid of, then you can start looking for ways to deal with it.

You will never be able to come to terms with anxiety on the other hand until you can recognize and realize what is bothering you.

Taking the time to counsel yourself should assist you in realizing whether you are suffering from fear or anxiety. Allow yourself to transform your anxiety into fear. Then deal with the fear by taking action to dismantle it.

### **Personalize your approach to thinking.**

After all we can only:

- Solve what we can manage
- Manage so much of what has to be resolved
- Get help for some of the rest of what must be resolved
- Give the rest away.

### **Some last thoughts on worry...**

Perhaps you have heard of the term “stop-loss order” when playing the stock market. You set the stop-loss order to a certain amount of points and if the stock drops below that number, it is sold automatically. Apply the stop loss order model to anything you’re worrying about.

Stop and ask yourself:

- How many times have you let stress or worry keep you awake at night.
- How many times have you become so irritated that you took it out on loved ones?
- How many times have you let someone else's attitude about you or your work ruin your whole week?
- How much does this thing I am worrying about really matter to me?
- Have I already paid more for this than what it is worth?
- At what point do I put a "stop loss order" on this worry and forget it?

Decide how much worry and stress something is worth, then put a stop loss order on it. Do not give anymore of your life to it.

Seeking professional guidance through professional counselling or personal coaching during times of great change and stress is a sign of courage and caring for yourself and those around you. Besides everyone needs an outside opinion now and again.

*“Let our advanced worrying become advanced thinking and planning.”*  
Winston Churchill