

Keep Calm and Make Plans

These are strange times in which we find ourselves. The known has become the unknown, the certain, uncertain. And many of us are having to flex and adapt on a daily basis.

Tolerance for ambiguity and the unknown is a highly useful trait in times of change. As is the ability to keep our personal resilience levels topped up. Here are some top tips which will hopefully help you cope.



1. Look after yourself

Anxiety and **stress** are common reactions to upheaval, and have direct physical effects on your health. Be proactive about dealing with them in practical ways. **Exercise** is great for reducing the physiological symptoms of stress, by clearing the body of 'stress hormones.' And these days you can do this without even having to leave the house. If outside exercise isn't an option for you right now, then why not search online for a virtual class?

Meditation can also help calm the mind and reduce anxiety. Practices like **mindfulness** can help you to live in the present, without worrying about the future or obsessing about mistakes in the past.

Talk to someone you trust about your concerns. Discussing them out loud with someone objectively can not only help you to feel unburdened, but also to get some **perspective** on the situation. Maybe it's not as bad as it seems inside your head. It can be a good way to share coping strategies too.



2. Manage your expectations

One of the greatest causes of stress for many people comes from comparing how they think things should be with how they actually are.

"I should have been promoted by now."

"We should be making more profit."

The first question to ask is: "**according to whom?**" Often, the answer is "**nobody.**"

If you place expectations on yourself, the failure to meet them can make you unhappy and also keep you from appreciating the things you have. So instead of setting expectations, make plans. It's always good to have goals, but think of them as aspirations, not minimum requirements.



3. What's the worst that could happen?

Worrying about what's going to happen is literally **pointless**. Other than causing you stress (see above) it serves no purpose – unless you act on it! So instead of asking "What if?" ask "What **will I do** if?" Imagine the worst and then plan for what you will do in those circumstances. Knowing how you will handle it if things do go badly wrong takes a lot of the sting out of the worry. The answers may not always be obvious, so don't be afraid to **ask for advice** or talk to friends and colleagues, who may have the same worries, and some good ideas.



4. Focus on what you can control

Feeling out of control can be scary. So instead of worrying about the things you can't affect, focus on the things you can. Work out what you can do to benefit yourself, your department and/or your company, and do it. You'll probably feel better for knowing you're doing something **useful** and being **proactive**.



5. Spread your bets

Don't put all your eggs in one basket. If you have to make decisions about the future in a time of uncertainty, don't bet everything on **one outcome**. Try to keep your options open, so that, whatever happens, you're in a decent position to take advantage of it, whether that's personally or organizationally.

In short, don't leave yourself in a position where anything but the result you hope for is a disaster!



6. Be agile and alert

On both a personal and business level, the more agile you can make yourself, the better able you will be to cope with unexpected changes. In this sense, agile means being able to **quickly respond** to differing needs or **adapt** to changing circumstances.

On a personal level, this could mean not committing to a new **long-term** debt until the situation becomes clearer, for example. You could also think about **developing new skills**, which would not only make you more valuable to your employers, but also give you more options should you need to change jobs.

From an organizational perspective, this can mean many things, including:

- communicating openly and widely with employees,
- delegating responsibility and making people more autonomous – this leads to faster decisions and quicker responses to change,
- minimizing bureaucracy and complexity wherever possible,
- avoiding committing to long-term projects which will be costly to change or cancel.

At the same time, be **alert**. Without becoming obsessed, make sure you are staying on top of changes which will affect you and your business. The sooner you know about events, the quicker you can react to them. **Pay attention!**

Go with the flow

If you can accept uncertainty for what it is, prepare yourself for various outcomes, address your worries head on and manage your personal stress levels,

you'll cope much better in 'interesting times' and, hopefully, put yourself in a stronger position to deal with whatever eventually comes your way.