

# equanimity

*mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper,  
especially in a difficult situation*

Many people are experiencing life these days caught up in some sort of crisis or conflict, be it at work, at home or in relationship. It might be stress around processes, deadlines, budgets and job security, or personal relationships and unresolved conflicts, or how to resolve health or education challenges, or whether what they are doing is what they really want to be doing with their life.

Stress is the wrapper surrounding their lives. They are consistently experiencing racing heartbeats, shortness of breath, tight jaws, facial frowns, rigid postures, negative emotions, critical and judgmental inner dialogue, illness and disease. Their lives are defined by automated, robotic reactivity to conflict and crisis.

**But it doesn't have to be this way.**

**What is equanimity?** Equanimity is a capacity for calmness and balance even in a difficult situation. The concept provokes the image of a sailboat managing to remain upright and balanced even in heavy winds. Although the sails sway in the breeze, they hold centeredness.

As some have mistaken, it is not the suppression of feelings, apathy, aloofness or inexpressiveness.

**How does this affect the workplace?** It could mean a sense of freedom and balance that we're not emotionally reacting strongly to things and wishing they were different than they are. At work, this also manifests by giving your full attention to the task you are doing *now*, without worrying about the one after it.

Equanimity allows us to stand in the midst of conflict or crisis in a way where we are balanced, grounded and centered. It allows us to remain upright in the face of the strong winds of conflict and crisis, such as: blame, failure, pain, or disrepute. Equanimity protects us from being blown over and helps us stay on an even keel.

*We all know at least one person who is able to remain calm no matter the external situation or circumstances.*

**How do they do it and how can you build your equanimity?**

**Recognizing that equanimity is not indifference, passivity, or resignation.** Building equanimity involves recognizing life's challenges and the resulting thoughts and emotions, while also engaging the capacity to experience balance. Acknowledging the realities of a situation, *but not being pulled emotionally too far in any direction*. From this place, it's possible to respond calmly, with resolve and action. Equanimity assists in personal and professional situations as well as engaging wrongs, oppression, and other confrontative issues in our communities and world.

**Letting it be OK to begin where we are.** Life presents many issues, for example, increasing demands at work, job transitions, health challenges, losses, political struggles. The tendency is to yearn for the way things were before the change or feel upset that things are this way. These habitual thought patterns and emotions can impede acceptance and action. Consider adopting a calming "this too shall pass" attitude; a knowing that things are changeable. Cultivating evenness, calmness, and self-compassion can lead to acceptance that it's OK to start where we are.

**Engaging techniques such as mindfulness.** Mindfulness is a relational quality, in that it does not depend on what is happening, but is about *how we relate to what's happening*. Mindfulness is a skill we can learn and practice like swimming or planting a garden. Pausing and taking one or several conscious breaths offers a respite for clarity.

## Equanimity Q & A:

Q: Won't trying to maintain equanimity just get me taken advantage of?  
If people are nasty to me, do I just have to sit there and take it?

A: **No**, equanimity does not mean that we simply accept anything that happens. Instead, it means that we don't spend our time worrying about it *when it isn't happening*. By focusing on what is actually happening right now, we may see opportunities to act to keep the situation from getting difficult, or see when we need to get out of a bad situation.

passion                      equanimity



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