

COVID Lockdown got you down?

How 6 tiny accomplishments unlock psychological energy to get life going again



“Trapped in prison,” is how one person described COVID lock down for a month, and they were correct. If you mentally believe you are in jail during the shelter in place process of flattening the coronavirus curve your brain will respond in kind. If you feel trapped by the recommendations of the CDC to stay home, expect to feel isolation, anger, anxiety, panic, desperation, lethargy, apathy, or a total loss of motivation.

Do you know what happens when you do the opposite?

When you look at shelter in place as a chance to ‘strengthen in place?’ The lessons may surprise you and the application may change you and your family for good after the lock down is lifted because there is a powerful shift that happens when you change your perspective.



Consider Nelson Mandela, who was the leader of ending apartheid in South African. He was locked up over his beliefs and imprisoned 27 years, 18 of those years at

the Robben Island Prison, a place of unspeakable hostilities. He was locked into a small jail cell, without a bed or toilet and forced to do hard labor. He could only write or receive a letter twice per year and have a social contact with a visitor for thirty minutes per year.

Did it crush him? Nope. It did the opposite, locked down on the outside unleashed a creative giant for Mandela on the inside. He grew in resilience and mental focus. He became more motivated than ever to end apartheid. What was his secret?

Use Lock Down to unlock your potential

If you view being locked down as a personal attack against you, expect crushing emotions, anxiety, loneliness, and perhaps even anger. Realize the universe is not trying to attack you – in fact, it is not about you at all. It is about facing the circumstances and finding other options.

You do not have to ever feel trapped in prison again because you have a choice. Nelson Mandela was forced into horrendous circumstances, yet developed daily disciplines, mental focus, and patterns of behavior. He rehearsed quotes, scriptures, and affirmations that he had learned as a child. He did not sit idle; rather, he faced the hostilities with inner strength by staying mentally focused and that is why he came out stronger. It's like the old saying,

“Two men looked through prison bars, one saw the mud, the other saw the stars.”



If you think comparing your situation to a Nobel Peace Prize winner is not accurate, think again. You are the most important person in the world to someone and your example will make all the difference to them. It may be your children, a sibling, your coworkers, or neighbors because your influence is greater than you think.

Unlocked doors can expose gaps to address

When the doors are unlocked, and you can go out again will you be coming out stronger or more stressed? Have you gained new skills, or just gained a new appreciation for people who care for tigers? There is a hidden source of psychological power that flows out of accomplishing small goals. Every step you take to gain new life skills is a step toward greater confidence and self-worth. That is how it is possible to come out of lock down stronger than when it started.

Being locked up blocks motivation but feeling you have been given the gift of more time to work on you does the opposite – it is a source of energy. As you take small steps in the right direction it moves you away from the stress and panic many people are feeling during coronavirus shelter in place.

How to shatter COVID lock down stress? Simple, learn new skills. Play against the computer in chess, sew your own DIY facemask, make useful household items out of paper towel rolls from www.pinkwhen.com or take an online cooking class.

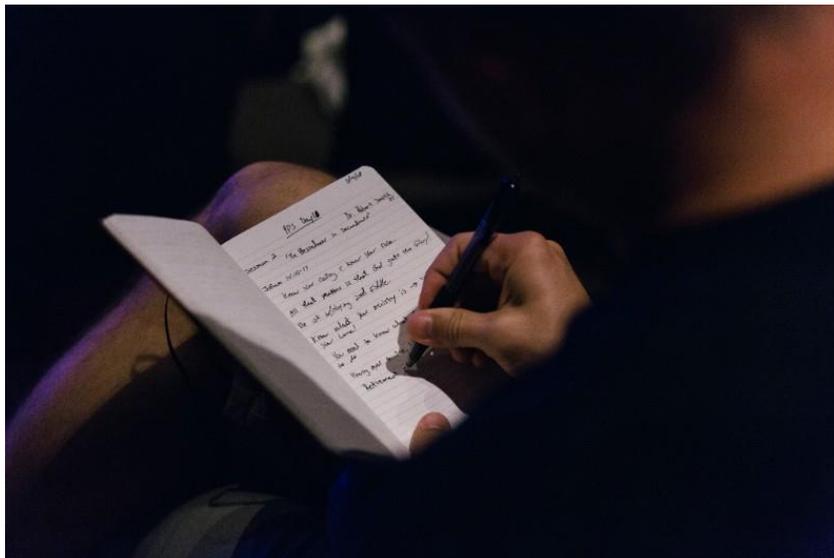


Give yourself some grace when learning new skills because you will not do it very well, but that's not the goal – the goal is to start something new to build mental resilience and personal confidence and start sooner than later.

Normal died during the birth of a new Reality

Coronavirus took away a lot of what we considered normal in life. Going to the movies, visiting a theme park, or meeting friends at a restaurant. These activities are gone for a while and may leave feelings of deep loss. It was like the word “Normal” died on March 11, 2020 when the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic named COVID-19.

If you have studied the teaching of the Swiss American psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross you may have heard of her five stages of grief. They are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance.



While the stages are not like walking down a series of stair steps, in that you may flow in or out of different ones during this crisis, breaking out of mental lock down does require moving through

them. Sometimes the way to speed that process is by learning something new on your way to fully accepting life on the other side of loss.

Small accomplishments give you inner strength

Harvard Business School studied how tiny accomplishments affected mood and motivation. The results of tracking 12,000 journal entries from 238 people were fascinating. The more individuals learned a tiny skill, and then wrote it down, the more their confidence was boosted. You can leverage that confidence to stay motivated on tasks that will help you during and after the coronavirus lock down. A tiny 'win' triggers the reward center of our brains which opens neurological pathways that boost self-confidence and personal pride.

The more you practice these tiny rituals, the more energy you will feel. The dopamine boost will make you feel better while boosting your ability to tackle more challenging tasks. Since COVID brings many challenges – the more energy you have the better you can handle whatever problems you may be facing the next few months.



Remember – you are not celebrating a huge achievement. You are celebrating the energy you will gain from crafting new habits out of tiny behavioral changes. The more you accomplish, the more power you create. Track your progress with your smart phone or using a habit tracker such as

www.Coach.me to reinforce your progress.

Here are small steps to boost energy during extended times at home from COVID shelter in place.

1. Personal hygiene

As simple as taking a shower or brushing your teeth sounds, it is rooted in the care of your body. You are worth keeping clean and refreshed, even if you have no place to go. As you make personal grooming and hygiene part of your routine, the easier it will be to find energy for the other tasks. Once you feel cleaned up then make sure to dress up a bit. Wearing the same pair of sweatpants for weeks will not brighten your mood. If you are working from home your focus is always better if you dressed like you were going in to work – *(especially pants)*. Discipline with the small tasks gives you energy for the bigger ones.



2. Make up your bed

Yep, if you can practice a tiny habit first thing in the morning, you gain strength for the next task. Getting out of bed, (hopefully on the first alarm), means you are getting up to face the day. It takes courage to get up some days, but once your eyes are open and

your feet hit the floor you will start to feel a tiny bit better. Breathe deep, stand up and pull those covers back over the pillows. Usually the bed is the largest thing in your room, so when it is made up – the room automatically looks better – another win!



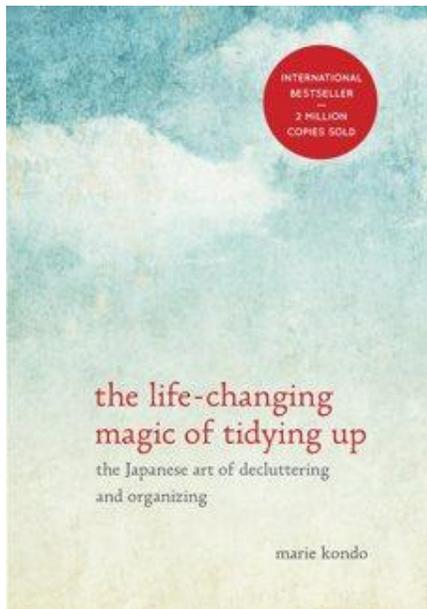
3. Healthy nutrition and hydration

Yes it's lock down and yes, unless you are going to the grocery store often, or have an account with www.Instacart.com it's unlikely you have enough fresh produce. However, you can choose to make meals that are nutritious over trying to survive on Captain Crunch. Water over soda, balanced over junk food. Everyone knows the difference, but not everyone goes for the tiny win of pushing away empty calories to gain physical and mental strength.

Another small win is to learn to cook. There are multiple cooking programs on the Food Network or YouTube to show you the basics of your favorite meals. Watching Kristen Bell trying to

make a balanced meal is entertaining as well as comforting since she giggles over the mistakes and gives a lot of grace. Feeling the connection with another busy mom creates some mental energy as well.

4. Clear the clutter



You don't have to Marie Kondo your whole house during a time of lock down, (See her book for more on how to recapture emotional energy by simply removing clutter <https://konmari.com/>) but cleaning up your closets or clearing out some still usable stuff to donate to the Salvation Army will make you feel better, and as your house looks less cluttered, you can think clearly. Think of how you feel when you walk into a resort hotel. It is refreshing to not have a ton of stuff scattered around.

Removing the clutter gives you a tiny accomplishment, and not replacing the clutter with more clutter will do even more. Simple is the pathway to remove stress. For an even bigger boost develop small systems for laundry, kitchen clean up and such. The more systems to keep your living space in order the more energy you will recapture.

5. Reach out for relationship

Isolation can lead to solitude or desperation. One is refreshing and peaceful; the other can lead to panic. Texting, FaceTime, Slack, Whatsapp, or just a plan or telephone call to check in will boost the mood of your friends while boosting yours as well.



Emailing someone an inspirational or funny gif might brighten their day and make a bigger difference than you could imagine. Don't wait for others to reach out to you – start the conversation as a tiny accomplishment. Some people call friends while they walk, so it is a little like they are walking together to create stronger connection. Reaching out sparks energy for you and will bring encouragement to them.

6. Sunshine as medicine

A century ago, the simple use of sunshine was viewed as medicine for those feeling ill. The benefits of vitamin D are well known, but there are multiple studies that show the benefit of bright light to brighten mood.

Full spectrum lighting can do that during the winter months, but here in Florida get outside for a bit to see how much better you feel. Go for a walk, bike ride, yoga stretch, round of golf or take the dog out. Whatever you do in sunlight, coupled with simple exercise will boost your energy for hours. Energy you will need to

tackle bigger problems that may arise during post-lockdown recovery.



How long it will take to fully recover from this stressful time is unclear leading some to feeling more and more pressure. Give up control of what you cannot control by seeking acceptance of the situation.

That is a proven step to feel stronger and it is so simple you can start first thing in the morning, just remember to make your bed.



Dwight Bain is a Nationally Certified Counselor who writes on managing crisis to create positive change. He lives in Orlando with his wife, two kids and four cats. Follow him across all social media @DwightBain