

# An Entrepreneur's Framework For Gaining Mental Clarity In Stressful Situations

I'm a naturally high-stress person, and my condition is only made worse by my passion for entrepreneurship.

As anyone who has given into their entrepreneurial urges knows, the process of creating something from nothing and, more importantly, transforming your creation into something sustainable is incredibly challenging.

People often liken the experience to a roller coaster, with its equal share of ups and downs, excitement and fear. This analogy, however, doesn't quite capture the reality of the experience.

Anyone can survive the short-term fear of a roller coaster. Not everyone can endure the stress of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship isn't like a ride or a game, where there is a finite ending to the experience. The stress and fear of entrepreneurship is pervasive, persistent, and cumulative over time.

Chronic stress negatively impacts both our physical and mental well-being, and it severely hampers our decision-making abilities.

Entrepreneurs cannot hope to survive by passively moving from crisis to crisis. The chronic stress of entrepreneurship requires an active management framework.

I've developed the following strategy for achieving mental clarity in stressful situations out of sheer necessity. Businesses change, but stress remains the same. The framework isn't perfect, but it has been tremendously helpful for me over the years.

### **Identify, isolate, and eliminate "what if" thoughts**

My greatest weakness, both in life and business, is that I dwell on "what ifs." I worry so much about pain and suffering I might experience that I lose focus of the things that are in front of me.

This habit has, at times, become so debilitating that I long ago resorted to living my life in the most deliberate and buttoned-up manner possible. Still, despite having nothing to fear, my anxiety persists.

When confronted with a legitimately stressful scenario, this tendency flares up and serves to make a bad situation even worse.

To combat this, I take time every day to write down a list of everything on my plate, taking extra time to ensure that I include stressors both real and perceived.

Next, I highlight the things that I cannot control and strike them from my list. There is no point in trying to rationalize paying any attention to these items. The only way to escape their toxic effects is to starve them of attention and focus on things that you can change.

If you let these thoughts and worries run wild, they build up over time. This mental buildup acts like a parasite, siphoning off energy, ideas, and happiness. You have to destroy this parasitic influence and replace it with thoughts that are productive.

**Don't agonize. Take action.**

If you're an introspective person like me, there's a good chance that your natural tendency is to agonize over situations, fearing the implications of your decisions and worrying about how others perceive them.

Don't give in to this temptation.

My advice is simple: think about the situation, identify a solution, and take decisive action.

There are two immutable facts I've learned over the course of my entrepreneurial journey. The first is that no one cares about you or your failures as much as you think. The second is that no one will come to your rescue: you have to save yourself when times get tough.

Agonizing over situations is pointless. You have to rip off the proverbial band-aid and do what must be done to survive.

This action serves a dual purpose, alleviating your mental stress and actively working toward a solution to the problem at hand.

I've often referred to this as working my way out of a problem. Sure, it doesn't always fix the issue I'm facing, but it does change my perception enough to help me endure whatever I'm dealing with.

### **Set short-term goals and celebrate your victories**

I don't know about you, but I'm not a fan of delayed gratification. I'm a Pavlovian creature, like most of us. I need to experience rewards and positive reinforcement to sustain a course of action.

When you're dealing with a stressful period in your life, it's easy to succumb to the feeling that nothing short of complete resolution of the task at hand will offer any satisfaction. This is foolish.

In every journey, there are small victories that can and should be celebrated. When I was a child, my father liked to take me on long hikes in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Being a somewhat unathletic child, these hikes felt more like death marches than fun outings.

I remember feeling that the hike was never-ending, and that drained me of my will to go on. It was only when my father shared the secret to endurance that things changed.

He told me not to focus on reaching the end of the trail. Instead, pick a marker of some kind, whether it be a tree or just a point in the distance, and push yourself to make it there.

Once you made it, take a moment to celebrate your victory and then pick another spot in the distance. Sure, you ended up walking the same distance at the end of the day, but the act of breaking up a long haul into manageable bites does wonders for your perception of the challenge.

The same thing applies to work. When you're stressed, fearful, or overwhelmed, the trick is to force yourself to pick a short-term goal. For me, I'll say "I want to meet with every member of my team today" or "I want to write two articles this afternoon." The details aren't important. What's important is that they're tasks that serve your overall goal and can be completed in a day.

Then, I complete those tasks. Once done, I take a moment to reflect and celebrate this victory, however small it may be. The act of getting something done is energizing and gives me the strength to take the next step.

## **It takes work**

I've yet to meet a person who is just naturally cool under

pressure. Every great leader I've ever encountered or read about possessed their mental framework for dealing with stressful times in their lives.

This grace under fire takes a lot of work to cultivate and nurture, and even then there will undoubtedly be moments where you falter. The key is never to give up. Face your stresses and fears head on, and do what you can to work your way out of the situation. It takes practice, but over time you'll find that you're capable of handling far more than you realize.

I'm the Co-Founder & CEO of BodeTree, a tech-enabled franchise services company. I'm a frequent MSNBC contributor and the author of "Enlightened Entrepreneurship." All in all, I'm just looking to bring a bit of Zen to the world of business. Follow me on Twitter @chris\_...[MORE](#)

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