

# Coping in Uncertain Times A Huna Perspective

by Pete Dalton

*May you live in interesting times*  
a proverb of uncertain origin

The saying above can be seen as both a blessing or a curse. In our lives, change is a constant. Sometimes change is small and incremental, so small as to be almost imperceptible. At other times change can be exciting and a welcome adventure and at other times change can be massive, 'in your face', disruptive and unwelcome.

With the latter, it can really be a case of 'shit happens', as the saying goes, and it does. The extent that it seems that way can also be influenced.

The current events with a global viral pandemic, threats to health, restrictions on movement and enforced changes to behaviour, is an example of a disruptive unwelcome change. This almost appeared to come out of nowhere and I was blindsided by it and took a while to be able to get some perspective.

## **A Starting Point**

Understandably many people are experiencing a great deal of fear about their well-being and that of people they care about and also anxiety about what might happen in the future over the short, medium and long term. There are some other common reactions to such events. These include: anger: 'how can this be happening to me?'; 'This is not how I want things to be!' and denial: 'this isn't happening'; and disbelief: 'this isn't real'.

With all these reactions, it can be easy to be swept up on a wave of emotion and find it difficult to stop and get some perspective. A useful starting point is to accept what is happening right now. This does not mean you believe it is something that you want to be happening, but nevertheless you accept that right now this is how things are. This paves the way for becoming more relaxed and centred. It's not always easy, but it's important.

## **Accepting the Unknown**

Well, ok, we can't accept the unknown, as we don't know what it is. We can however accept that in a unique and complex situation we just don't know what the future will bring. This can be tough. We have a natural *Lono* tendency to want neat beginnings, middles and ends and for there to be a sense of resolution to things. There will be a resolution, we just don't know what it will be right now and learning to be right with that is part of acceptance.

Another associated challenge is that when we are embroiled in unproductive emotions and uncertain of the future, we can tend towards imagining what the future is going to be. This is,

of course, pure guess work and coming from an unproductive, uncentered place, very likely to be poor guess work at that. We can get into the mindset of wondering ‘what if?’ and projecting images of the worst imaginable futures. Focussing on that does nothing to calm your mind where and when it most matters - which is here and now.

### **Doing, Doing, Gone!**

Under such circumstances another reaction can kick in: the desire to be doing something to overcome the problem. We often live in a state of ‘doing’ and therefore react to problems by wanting to face them head on and change things. In some cases, this is an appropriate thing to do, taking decisive and direct action can get to the source of the problem and solve it. However, some problems are outside of our direct control. Despite the regular rhetoric about ‘fighting the virus’, we are not being effective if we think that we have to go and do that. As a regular individual, this is not a suitable course of action even if it were to be possible. This does not mean that we have to do nothing at all. It just means that as far as that course of action is concerned, taking direct action is not an option. If we shift our focus, then there are of course things we can do to assist during a crisis – both supporting others and looking after ourselves. Working on ourselves—affecting our inner world—can help us be more resourceful in the outer world. Here’s just a few simple things that can help. Please don’t be fooled by the simplicity, the secret is in the doing.

### **Relaxation**

Making time to relax, no matter how hectic and uncertain things appear, is important. I have worked with people who have claimed not to have relaxed for many years and who, without fail, have been able to experience relaxation and it’s benefits when coached around doing so. Relaxation can be as simple as noticing and focussing on your breathing. Simple *pikopiko* breathing whenever you can make time can help to begin to develop the pattern of relaxation. Relaxation helps to dispel tension and related emotions such as fear and anger, which rely on tension, and has many attendant long-term benefits. Getting absorbed into an activity can increase relaxation, so make time for something you enjoy doing or maybe take the time to learn or try something new. Even in times of crisis, choosing to make time to relax is key, even if it is mere moments to begin with.

### **Presence**

When our minds are racing, thinking about what ifs and the future and what we might have done differently in the past, we lose connection with the present moment. Mentally we are somewhere else. When we are focussed in the present moment, we are most effective and centered. This reminds me of Stephen Russell AKA Barefoot Doctor and his metaphor of the theatre of life and being able to get a wider perspective than just being caught up in the story that is being acted on the stage:

*“if you’ve got a show going on on stage in the front of you, you need to sit behind it in the audience part of the theatre in order to see what’s going on....without getting drawn into the story, without getting suckered by appearances”.*

Taking opportunities to become more present is valuable. This can involve simple things like noticing your breathing pattern in the moment, or becoming fully aware of objects, colours and shapes in your immediate environment. This can even extend to appreciation, for example the beauty of simple things such as the way certain objects cast a particular shadows in the sun light or noticing the vibrant colour of a flower in bloom. Again, this is a habit that may need to be developed and consciously making time to stop and be present is one way of doing this.

Of course, if you can't help racing off into the future and focusing on worst case scenarios and asking 'what if X?' you can always try asking 'what if X doesn't happen?' or 'what if something brilliant and unexpected happens?' When we are feeling anxious, we have a tendency to have a narrow focus on instances of things turning out badly. This means that unless we make an effort to do so, we will fail to entertain other possibilities and other possible brighter futures.

## **Resilience**

*Hiki mai ka mālie, a hiki mai no ka 'ino.*

Hawaiian proverb

Good weather comes and bad weather comes, too.

When faced with challenges, people can be unexpectedly resilient and bring to bear coping mechanisms that they did not believe they had. I expect we have all had times when we expected the worst, yet in practice we got through. Research has suggested that not only is this the case but in fact we may underestimate or even be unaware of our tendency to adapt to and cope with negative events. And, in some cases, at a subconscious (*Ku*) level we may already be bringing to bear coping mechanisms in anticipation of an event. This psychological bias which influences us to believe we are not going to be able to cope, has been referred to as 'immune neglect'<sup>1</sup> Focussing on the innate resilience we have, remembering that we have overcome challenges in the past and being aware that we can often imagine what the future will be like without taking into account our natural resilience, are all useful things to do.

## **Other Techniques**

There are many other Huna practices that can help you to relieve anxiety and fear, become more grounded and centred and get a fresh perspective on things. Here I offer just one more thing which just happened to assist me recently and is incredibly simple.

It is a simple form of what might be termed 'treasure hunting'. This is useful if you are finding it difficult to focus on the positive in the here and now. The process is to simply spend some time in a relaxed state and ask your *Ku* (subconscious) to present you with some pleasant or fun memories and as they arise just allow yourself to dwell on them in as much detail and, as much as possible, feel that you are reliving the memory. This activity can have

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert et al (1998). "Immune neglect: A source of durability bias in affective forecasting". Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 75 (3)

a positive impact on your subjective well-being beyond the period of practice. It sounds so simple and almost unbelievable but as with all these things they need to be practiced to be appreciated.

There are of course many other techniques that are useful, for example, meditative techniques such as the Eye of the Storm meditation here: <https://www.urbanhuna.org/using-huna-to-stop-and-be-present/>

In this article, I have deliberately focussed on techniques to use with yourself. Of course, there are lots of things you can do to support others and the community around you during uncertain times.

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