How's your mental health?

Resilience doesn't mean being okay all the time. It means feeling pain, anger, grief when the situations call for them, and having the strength to move forward one breath at a time

Philippine Daily Inquirer · 7 Nov 2023 · C2 · By Sheila Tan @Inq_Lifestyle The author is an executive coach and an organizational development consultant. You may reach out to her through coachsheila.tan@gmail.com.

The quality of your mental health determines the quality of your life. No amount of money, fame, material things or intelligence can substitute for mental health.

Mental health may mean different things for different people. For some, it means being able to splurge on a bag they've been eyeing. It may mean eating a delicious meal for others. It may also mean being able to remove toxic people. I would say that not taking care of one's mental wellness makes these things necessary to prevent insanity. And ironically, being healthy mentally and emotionally make these things irrelevant.

Having high quality mental health for me means something more foundational, more internally driven. Whenever I meet with clients, I have some landmarks that I look for to gauge if they maybe misdiagnosing their problems, and if we need to go deeper to make the presenting problems irrelevant. The following are some of the things I look for.

Strong sense of self. A friend once told me, "Your best weapon in life is knowing yourself enough that no matter how people praise you, you won't have an inflated view of yourself. And no matter how people criticize you, it won't make you minimize yourself." Having self-awareness and self-acceptance is a must for a healthy mental health. It prevents life's unnecessary pains.

Appropriate emotions. Feeling appropriate emotions in situations is quite rare. Most have exaggerated emotions for situations. The opposite extreme is also true. Others don't experience the whole spectrum of emotions. Some emotions aren't allowed—some forbid anger and sadness, and others forbid happiness. Having emotions that are too much or not enough for the situation at hand often means our view of the world is different from reality. Having the right emotions at the right time, and expressed with and to the right people is the ideal state we want to be in.

Eustress. Good stress. This happens when we are stretching ourselves beyond comfort zone, to the extent that it's positively challenging. Many think that having no stress is the ideal state, as they daydream of saving enough to afford just sitting all day and watching Netflix. Extended periods of doing nothing will eventually lead to lifelessness and feeling of uselessness. We want to keep living a life of meaning until the last hours of our lives—no matter what shape and form that takes. Having something to work towards with excitement makes a purposeful life.

Resilience. Having a solid core that prevents external events from knocking us down. This doesn't mean being okay all the time. It means feeling pain, anger, grief when the situations call for them, and having the strength to move forward one breath at a time. This allows us to go through life, daring to go for our dreams. Lack of resilience makes one live in fear, with the instinct to make oneself small and invisible. Resilience empowers one to show up and be seen, risking possible setbacks. This is also the only way we can make a real difference in the world.

Quality relationships. Being able to establish and maintain friendships is not as common as I expected. I'm surprised by how many people I know who have stopped connecting with friends. The only circle they surround themselves with are the people they work with. If subordinates and yes people are all that they have, it may deprive them of deeper connections and unbiased feedback of how they're living their lives.

Being integrated with all parts. Mind-body connection is a natural state of being human. However, one can create a false dichotomy. When one says, "my mind wants this but my body doesn't follow," this is an indication that there is a misalignment. Getting one to be integrated with all parts of oneself eradicates the battles inside the head. This alignment allows one to have more energy and focus to live life. So much unnecessary energy is wasted with internal battles that remain unresolved.

Ability to enjoy the present moment. In the book "Power of Now," Eckhart Tolle writes about majority of the population living in the past with regrets and what ifs or living in the future with anxieties and worries. Living in the moment is when happiness and joy can be possible. Just look around in a restaurant, and you'll see how many people grab their phones at the slightest moment of silence. This inability to stay present has robbed many of us of inner peace, and of staying connected with ourselves and our loved ones.

Many of these items above are natural phenomena yet we've found ways to make them almost impossible. If more people could give space for these things, we'll have a happier population. Our mental health will be enablers of our highest and best version.