

25 “Tried and Proven” Coping Tips for Surviving Tough Times

by Nancy Byerly Jones

(Not intended as all-inclusive and not listed in any order of priority)

1. Ask ourselves often – “If attitudes are contagious, is *mine* worth catching?! Is it a can-do or can’t do attitude? Is it productive or destructive to me and those around me?”
2. *Real time living* – we must learn to cherish and live each moment to its fullest rather than diluting their value because our thoughts are focused on past or future "stuff" – even the bad moments need our full and undivided attention. Think about how often we allow ourselves to get stuck in the past or future which means we are at best diluting the value of the moment at hand or at worse, *totally* missing it (i.e. how often are we “listening” to others while checking for text messages at the same time?) How many *real time living* moments have we lived today? How many have we missed? By the way, if we aren't practicing "real time living" around our horses, we are putting ourselves at an unnecessary and very high risk of potential danger!
3. We *must* make *quality* time for exercise, adequate sleep, playtime, relaxing activities, our 4-legged family members and no-tech hours in our lives (i.e. *at least* a few hours -- or better yet a full day -- of no TV, no text messaging, no emailing, no newspapers, no technology toys, etc.).
4. We *must* eat healthy “stuff” more often than not and minimize the not-so-healthy.
5. We *must* learn and practice the power, joy and calming benefits of deep breathing, and meditation (even 1 minute of stillness *IS* meditation). We even benefit greatly just from sniffing the right stuff (e.g. relaxing essential oils, favorite aromas and if you're like me, just the smell of a barn is an instant relaxer/release from the stresses in our lives!).
6. Simplify everything we can in our work, personal and barn lives!
7. Say “No” to indecision; revert to an old pro’s/con’s list to help sort out the good and not-so-good; when appropriate, delay making certain non-emergency decisions and schedule a future specific date to rethink them and make a decision; this simple technique can relieve our shoulders from the tremendous weight of indecision!
8. Create a personal budget; review it often, tweak when necessary and stick to it! If you are in charge of financial affairs at work, do the same ASAP! It's absolutely frightening how many of us do not have a written budget for ourselves or our companies.
9. Create simplified action plans for our work-related, equine-related and personal goals, review daily and transform them into realities (also called our personal cheat sheets or road maps for staying in control of our lives and helping us to reach our goals not just talk about them).

10. Work hard on minimizing (or better yet eliminating!) our personal negativity *and* the time spent with negative people. When such toxic encounters are unavoidable, prepare in advance a few constructive responses (physically, mentally and verbally) for the anticipated (or history-proven!) kinds of situations we're sure to face. And, while we are in the midst of the discomfort, live each moment as it comes rather than focusing (i.e. dreading!) what's next or dwelling on what negativity has already occurred. Also, we should ask ourselves often what *we* could change or do differently with our attitudes, body language or words to help improve the negative relationships in our lives. It's far easier to criticize what others are doing wrong than it is to identify, face and eliminate *our* bad habits or harmful ways of communicating. We won't succeed in cleaning up our negative environments unless we start with "cleaning up" our negativity first.
11. Make a list of our fears (big, small and in between) and a list (mini action plan) of what actions and constructive steps we can take to ease or eliminate them (e.g. riding horses again after a nasty spill and/or injury, potential job loss, financial worries, tense relationships, illness).
12. Stay in touch with every single thing that's stressing us out. Identify and re-train our minds to let go of and quit our bellyachin' about those stresses that are totally out of our control to change (e.g. a relative's lousy attitude, airport delays, a storm moving in just when the horseshow got underway or when we were planning to go for a trail ride, etc.).
13. Spend more time with our friends (and our 4-legged family members!)...by human friends, I mean our *true* friends...end or minimize time spent with the veneer, insincere "friends" in our lives.
14. Seek professional or other help when warranted for our physical or mental well being. Consider hiring a personal trainer, mentor, career or life coach to help get you going in the right direction.
15. Make a top ten list of activities you enjoy most with your family, significant others, friends and horses to ensure you make time to incorporate those activities into your busy life...if we're too busy to do this, some soul searching and prioritizing is definitely in order ASAP!
16. Tough times just may be the *perfect* time to make time for long-ignored passions (e.g. riding our horses more often, community theater, singing in a choir, scuba diving, learning to play a musical instrument, etc.)
17. We shouldn't allow tough times to isolate us – to the contrary, what better time to volunteer to do a needed community service! Volunteers ALWAYS receive far more than they give in their time or effort *and* volunteering has been proven to be great for our mental well being including helping treat depression. Why not check out a nearby therapeutic riding program for the disabled and mentally challenged...they are usually always looking for great, horse-loving, people-loving volunteers!

18. Unfortunately, we too often focus on what we don't have or on other negatives in our lives. We can help conquer this unhealthy habit by starting each and every day with a mental count of all the blessings in our lives from the biggest to the smallest.
19. Listen to your favorite music more often, dance to it, sing along with it and enjoy the mini-vacation such "let loose" behavior offers. I love doing barn chores, but it's even more fun with my favorite music - my mucking rake, "Jake," is an AWESOME dance buddy...always ready to dance when I am and loves me regardless of my uncoordinated, but heartfelt dance moves!
20. Think about and improve our coping, anger management and conflict resolution skills in recognition that all relationships are subject to more strain (and neglect!) in our tougher times. Sad, but true that we often treat absolute strangers with more politeness than we do our own family members. Is this because we take our families for granted or that we are in denial about the extent of harm a relationship can suffer due to extended neglect of its well-being and "health?"
21. At work, go beyond what others expect of us. Even if not asked, brainstorm cost-saving ideas and more efficient systems and procedures. Assist others without being asked first and whether it's our job or not to do so. Practice smart risk management habits to minimize the chance for costly, embarrassing or otherwise harmful errors. Enhance, re-enhance and keep enhancing our interpersonal and conflict resolution skills (no matter how great we may think we already are in this department!). Ask ourselves often: "Would I be proud of my actions at work if I were secretly videotaped while on the job?"
22. Make humor a daily part of our days...better yet, hourly! Share smiles and laughter more often with others. Smile even when alone or have no immediate reason to smile - it's amazing how our facial muscles in the smile position can instantly deflate (or at least decrease!) our negative thoughts. Make time for comedy via TV shows, movies, plays and other activities. Our donkeys provide heavy doses of amusement and comedy for us each and every day...they truly have a great sense of humor if you just take the time to observe and be with them enough. And, I find it next to impossible to look at a donkey's adorable long ears without a stress-relieving smile breaking out on my face?!
23. We should be ourselves and love ourselves at all times - the good, the bad and the ugly. Trying to be what we "ain't" catches up with us sooner or later. We can be our own worst enemies and must be willing to forgive ourselves when we mess up, fix what needs fixing from our mistakes and learn from them so that our next mistake is at least a fresh, brand new one! Note....loving ourselves should not be linked to how we look, our weight, the color of our hair, etc....loving ourselves means loving our spirits, our souls - our true essence, not our "covers" and other disguises. Ditto re our we see and love others!
24. We must follow the right "shoulds" when making decisions...the best "shoulds" that guide us must come from what we've learned and experienced in our lives -- from our inner voices/instincts -- **not** usually from the multiple voices of the "you should, you should not's" put in our heads by others no matter how well meaning their advice may have been.

25. When we're stressing over or griping about something, we should always ask ourselves: ***"This time next year, do I want this same worry or stress on my plate?"*** If not, we must get busy doing something constructive to get rid of or at least reduce that particular problem in our lives. And, if it's okay for certain stresses to remain on our plates long term, then at least we should quit stressing over them and stop complaining to others about things we can change, but we won't, don't or ain't gonna!

*Yesterday is a cancelled check.
Tomorrow is a promissory note.
Today is the **ONLY** cash I have
So I **must** spend it wisely!*

About the Author and Contact Information:

With over 20 years of experience under her belt, former practicing/"recovering" lawyer, author and public speaker Nancy Byerly Jones serves as a planning, quality of life, and management solutions/career coach for individuals, businesses and law offices nationwide. A certified mediator, Nancy primarily mediates employee and family disputes. She welcomes opportunities to speak to associations, office and other groups and to help review, resolve or brainstorm equine-related issues with clients in person or by phone or video conferencing.

Contact info., etc.....

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