

A Guide to Getting Good at Dealing with Chaos

It is a wonderful thing to have order to our lives, to simplify and have routines and systems that make things peaceful, organized, and calm.

Unfortunately, life likes to throw chaos and disorganization our way.

Things get disrupted, people interrupt, email requests pour in, our neatness gets messy, schedules get thrown into disarray, things get busy and hectic and complicated.

How can we stay sane in the middle of all this chaos? How can we take the chaos and busyness and messiness, and use them as opportunities to get *good* at handling it all?

The answer is with practice. And the practice is a method of letting go and re-centering in the middle of chaos.

The Method: Letting Go & Re-Centering

When chaos and messiness come our way, it's not necessarily a *bad* thing. It's not inherently stressful and anxiety-inducing. It's just that our minds don't usually like these things. We want order and simplicity.

So the problem isn't the external situation. It's our internal ideals. We *want* order and simplicity, not to be interrupted, not to be overwhelmed. The ideal of orderliness is causing our frustration, stress, anxiety, not other people, not a chaotic situation.

The ideal of orderliness causes our difficulties. And we created the ideal. Therefore, we are causing our own difficulties.

The good news is that, if we created the ideal, we have the power to change it.

What if we let go of our ideal of orderliness, and created a new ideal: the perfect situation is what is in front of us. Our current experience is perfect, as messy and uncomfortable as it is. It is absolutely *perfect*. We just need to see its beauty.

So in the middle of chaos, the method is this:

1. Notice that we are getting anxious or frustrated.
2. Notice that our ideal of orderliness is causing the difficulty.
3. Let go of that ideal, which is causing our pain and struggle.
4. Breathe, and re-center ourselves, so that we become calm. This is simply returning to the present moment, with no ideals, seeing the situation afresh and with new eyes and an open heart.

5. See the beauty and perfection in the moment in front of you.

That's the method, and it is simple. But not easy.

The difficulty comes from a couple of things. First, we don't like to let go of our ideals. We want things to be the way we want them. We want people to behave the way we think they should act. We want control over things. That we can't actually have these things doesn't often matter. We want them nonetheless. Second, we have difficulty in seeing the perfection in chaos and disorder. They don't live up to our ideals, so seeing the beauty in them is foreign. We need to open up to them, but we're not used to it.

The answer to these problems comes with practice.

The Practice: Opening Up

Whenever you have difficulty with disorder and chaos, with letting go and seeing the perfection in the moment ... this is an opportunity for practice. And what a wonderful opportunity it is.

Feel the hardness in your heart when someone is behaving imperfectly. Feel the sharp edge in your chest when things start to fall apart and get messy. Feel the frustration in your torso when someone interrupts your quiet time, or leaves their things out and makes a mess.

Then see that as a wonderful opportunity to practice.

Here's the practice:

1. Notice when you're resisting the method above. It could be because you don't want to let go of your ideal (what you want) or because you don't want to see the beauty in the current moment. It's one of the two (and they're the same thing).
2. Sit (or stand) still. Pause and notice your resistance. Notice what's going on.
3. Try to open your heart and mind, just a little. Be less closed off, and more open to what's happening. How can this be your teacher? How can you open up, just 1%, to what is in front of you?

Little by little, you can learn to let go of your ideals (which are causing you difficulty) and open up to the perfection of the messiness of this moment. And as you do, you'll get better at chaos. You'll be the master of messiness. You'll be the Zen center of the universe. What an amazing gift to give yourself.

Quick Survey: Zen Habits Workshops in Your City

Guys, I've decided to take my show on the road! I'm going to come to your city (maybe) and conduct one- or two-day workshops on different topics. And I need your help in choosing!

Take two minutes to fill out this survey.

It will help me pick cities to come to, and topics for the workshops. I'm going to announce a couple of workshops for October/November, and you can help me! Thank you.