

WEBINAR SERIES

State of Change



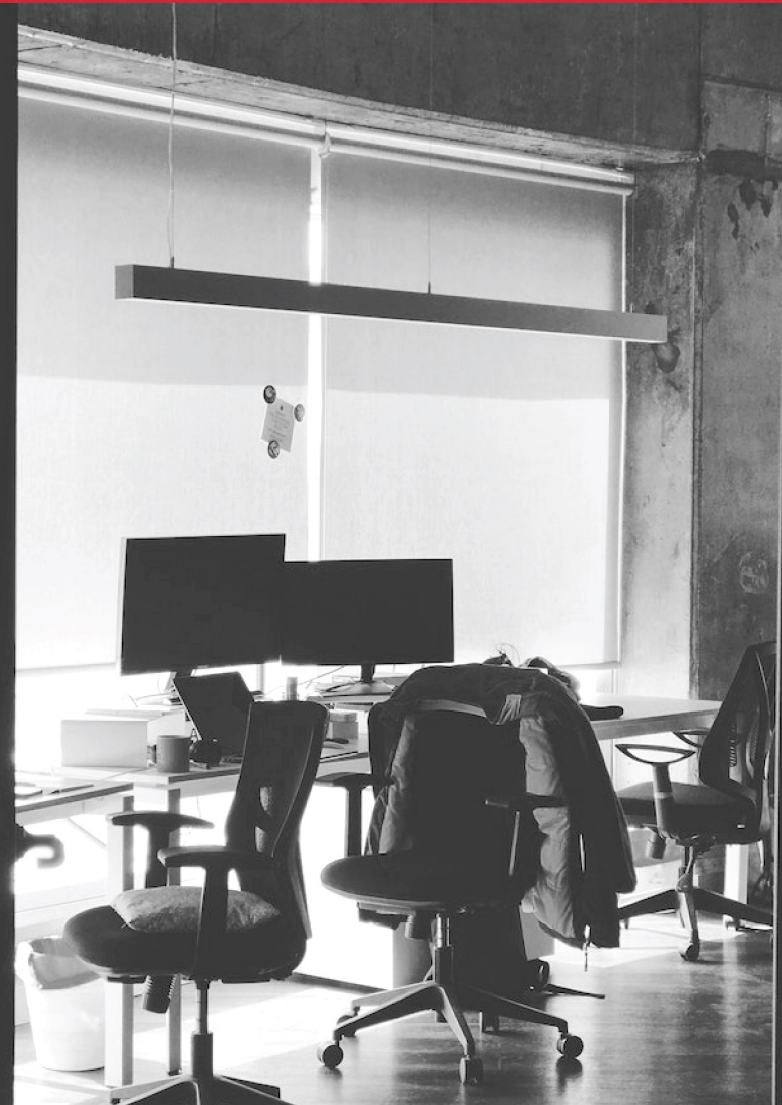
Managing Your Mental Health in Tough Times

HOSTED BY:
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FEATURING:
DR. CURT THOMPSON,
PSYCHIATRIST, SPEAKER, AND AUTHOR



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BACKGROUND

There has long been an increasing dialogue around the importance of mental health in our world, and perhaps we've never needed it more than we do right now.

The current crisis is rippling across the world and is touching every one of us, in different ways. We all feel so many emotions, often swinging from one extreme to another within a few moments. Perhaps most challenging is that we're not sure how we are "supposed" to feel, as if there is a right and wrong way to feel in such unprecedented, uncertain times. What we often fail to do is give ourselves permission to just be human and to embrace whatever it is we feel, but with hope. But how?

In this webinar, 5by5 CEO, Shannon Litton, spoke with psychiatrist, author and speaker, Dr. Curt Thompson, about ways we can look after our mental health, be honest and maintain hope in the midst of difficult times.



02

Curt, what are you seeing and hearing from many of the people you serve right now?



From a neurobiological standpoint, our anxiety represents a sense that we might be left alone. The sense of being left or being left alone is often the source of a lot of people's anxiety.

It's not necessarily the specific event or crisis that is happening, but how the event leaves me feeling powerless to do anything about what may result from it, that makes us anxious. We're anxious, then we're told to go to our "corners" and not come out. This all compounds while we're just trying to be safe.

Justifiably, many people are finding this to be a very hard time. And it's not hard because you're weak, or because you're stupid.

It's hard because you're human.

And because of the situation we are in, we're being asked to live in a way that our embodied minds were not designed to live.



03

How can we know what it's ok to feel right now?



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Attachment & Meaning

It's important that we validate that loss has everything to do with attachment, and the meaning we attach to particular things, people, objects, experiences, work, etc.

Meaning is never to be minimized.

When we give something meaning, we're not doing it because we're immature. There is something about that object, that experience, that person, detail or project that is really part of our God-created and given sense of making things.

When something happens that threatens, shifts or takes that sense of meaning away, it is to have an essential part of who we were meant to be taken away.



Naming Loss

No matter what our loss is, small or large, **it is important to be able to name it**, and not just to ourselves, but to others who are able to validate and acknowledge it.

If I don't name that felt sense of loss that I have about whatever it is, I am then going to have to burn energy to contain that emotional state.

In turn, the energy that I'm using to contain the loss that I'm not naming is draining the energy that I would use to name the next loss I have, and the next loss, then the next, and so on.

Moreover, it will be energy I will not have available to myself to continue to come up with new ways to create and "be" in this time that we find ourselves.



Lament & Gratitude

I encourage the practice of having a lament & gratitude journal, where you can name, everyday, the large and small losses you are wrestling with in that day. Not to rehearse them, but because they are on our minds, in our hearts and we feel them.

If we're not intentional, we can make the mistake of only naming what we are grieving, or reciprocally, failing to give ourselves permission to grieve the small things, for the sake of naming only the things we're grateful for.

Both grief and joy are often happening at the same time in the world.

Naming both of these things, then even sharing them with a trusted friend or family member, often gives us an opportunity to remain connected to the real world as it really is.

This, as opposed to moving into some disconnected space and pretending things are okay when they're not, or to a place where we are so overwhelmed with despair, that we can't see the things that are good in our life, is crucial.



04

What are some practical things we can do daily to help us get through this period?



The Body

One of the things we're learning in all this is the importance of the body, and what happens to us when we don't have contact with other people and are also less mobile.

It is very important to be mobile and move around. Plan to not always work in the same space. This might be difficult if you have a smaller space or have kids in the house, etc, but as much as is possible, move around and do your work in different spaces, even if it is different spaces in the same room. Also, make sure you are taking time to stand as much as possible.

Movement

It is actually better for your brain if you plan to do more frequent, but less lengthy, exercise, rather than to do one long walk or workout.

It's better for your mind and your body if you do a couple 10-15 minute walks, than finding time to do a single 30 or 40-minute walk. It is even better if you can schedule them.

This moves your body more frequently and also gives your mind something to look forward to.



Sleep

I strongly recommend turning off all screens – phones, tablets, laptops, tvs, etc. – at least one hour before you plan to go to bed.

This allows your brain, your mind and your body to reconnect. Being on a computer all day, talking with people remotely, is not really connection.

Reconnecting your mind with your body as the day ends helps tremendously in this area and will help you rest.

News & Social Media

Restrict your intake of news. The important news will find its way to you when it needs to.

I would recommend not scrolling through social media. It increases and advances distractibility, which makes you more anxious in the long run.



Spiritual Practice

To the degree you have a personal spiritual practice of some kind, doing things that enhance and nurture your spiritual formation and inner life is going to be really important.

Whether it is prayer, doing meditation or breathing work, all are helpful in centering your capacity to connect your thinking and imaginative brain with your body.

If your body, and your thinking, feeling, and sensing mind are more connected, you are more integrated and will be less anxious.

If you are less anxious, you are in a better position to create and to "be", in your life, relationships and work.



Telling Your Story

It is important to continue to tell our stories to other people.

It is important to have connection to someone on a daily basis.

Contacting others who are really able to help speak to who we are and what we're feeling, even if it is on a screen. Having moments where we see each other, and see one another SEEING each other gives us a sense that we are not alone.

We were not made to flourish by ourselves. We are who we are in response to all those around us and in our lives. And it is this connection that we sense we have lost or are losing. We desperately need that.



05

Since leaders are required to drive vision and ideation, how can they do that when stress seems to thwart their efforts?



Largely due to our modernity, we easily buy into the concept of being “the leader”, or “pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps”, etc. But neurobiologically and interpersonally, none of this is true.

Many of us have long had an assumption that it is our job to take care of ourselves, which is not the way human beings actually operate.

It is true that leaders occupy a particular space where they are a “head waters” that everything flows out from. But even headwaters get their resources from underground currents.

We cannot give what we do not have.



Consider:

1. Who are the other leaders you are talking to who can be honest with you about where they are?
2. Who are the other people in your corner who can give to you so that you can give to your team?

Sometimes, it is our team who gives to us. There are times when we can, in appropriate doses, be very transparent with our teams about the very real emotions we're feeling. This level of vulnerability can let your team know that they aren't alone in their sense of fear, worry or anxiety.

In doing this, your team is able to see you leading in the face of things that are imperfect, uncertain and difficult.

There is no leader that leads well who, at some level, is not being nourished by someone else.



06

How do we know when we're not ok, and when we need to reach out for professional help?



First, there is no “line” so bright and defined that would let us know when we are or are not “okay”.

If you even wonder if you’re okay, you should reach out.

But a few indicators of when you should reach out to someone else are:

- If you find your irritability gets to a point where you can’t contain it.
- If you find that it becomes very hard for you to imagine hopeful outcomes in the future.
- If you find that your sleeping patterns have changed and remain so for long periods of time.
- If you find yourself anxious and losing your appetite
- If you’re unable to stay focused

These things are often signals that your body needs help.



It is also helpful to look around and ask ourselves, **“are there things I could change or be doing to help mitigate what I’m experiencing?”**

This is also when it becomes helpful to engage the counsel of trusted voices in your life about what patterns or changes they’re observing.

Sometimes it is hard to ask others for help, especially about ourselves, but it can serve as a great act of trust in our relationships.



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FINAL THOUGHTS

As Curt shared, it is important to give yourself permission to grieve your losses while also being grateful. Name them both. This practice helps keep us connected to the way the real world works.

And keep an eye out for the signs that your body needs help. And if you need help outside yourself, reach out.



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Additional Resources



Articles by Dr. Curt Thompson

- [Love and Lament in March Madness](#)
- [A Body of Work](#)

Additional State of Change resources from 5by5

- <https://5by5agency.com/stateofchange>



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We work hard to understand your needs, challenges and the goals tied to your mission, allowing us to come alongside your team as committed partners.

We believe that *clarity x reach = results.*

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