Dear Class,

Yesterday I was talking to some of my oldest friends (literally and metaphorically, we did our masters and Ph.Ds together, that was many light years ago). We are all in the same business - psychology - helping people. Obviously our conversations alway touch upon the pandemic and how we can best be of service, this time we were talking about the pandemic, resilience and expectations.

So here's what I want to say in a nutshell in life we need realistic expectations. If we don't have realistic expectations we are going to make ourselves even more miserable than we need to be. And I'm seeing a lot of misery out there right now, so I'm assuming a lot of people aren't being realistic nor flexible nor adjusting their expectations.  Don't get me wrong, I'm not expecting people to be overjoyed (a realistic expectation), but I am hoping that people can be flexible enough so as to make their lives less bad.

What do I mean by realistic expectations you ask? Well there's a pandemic, I know that is obvious but it doesn't always seem obvious to me. I feel like so many people want it to be life as usual. By definition it can't be that way - a pandemic precludes that from happening. It reminds me of what I have been saying for the last few months - resilience is the ability to accept what we can't change and work with what we can. I repeated that line in different forms every email I wrote for a reason. We can't change that there is a pandemic, life can't be as usual, we can do our part to stop the spread but we can't change reality (a realistic expectation). Given the circumstances what can we change (a realistic expectation)? Remember a while back I wrote about being flexible!? Now's when!

So what can you change, what can you do differently to make life less miserable (a realistic expectation)? I say less miserable because there's a pandemic (I know I'm repeating myself but I feel it's the only way my message is going to get across), and within the context of a pandemic it's hard to expect more than being less miserable.  Remember a while back I confessed how I hate the outdoors and smiling, however I started going for walks and sort of smiling (well, maybe not much smiling) because it just had to be. Even though I wrote that email with levity I deeply believe that we need to adjust to our reality, we must be flexible. First we need to accept what is, then we need to adjust (self-compassion is very helpful).  Swimming upstream is a waste of energy, it's so much easier to go with the current. Now's the time to go with the current.

So, again, what can you change, what can you do differently to make life less bad? And I want to emphasize once again that we all have to accept the reality that for the time being (it's important to remember that, even though it doesn't feel that way, this is temporary) life is going to be hard, there's a pandemic. It's not fun to feel bad, but there's a pandemic, there's nothing we can do about that, except have realistic expectations of what life can be like and not make ourselves feel worse by fighting reality.

So, again what can you change,  I'm going to go first.  Let's see, what have I changed... as you know I don't go to the gym any more, I go for walks; I don't go out much, I tend to stay home much more (as you know I have health issues, what you don't know is I'm afraid to get into a fist fight with someone not wearing a mask); I don't meet friends in restaurants, we meet in each other's backyards; I haven't seen my family or friends who live far since this started, we zoom; when I'm bored I don't go out, I do a jigsaw puzzle or play bridge online; I don't go to schools to teach classes, next week I'm going to start giving classes on zoom. Don't get me wrong I miss doing strenuous exercise, I miss being able to go out, I miss my free will, I miss my kids, family and friends a lot, and I miss going into a school and interacting with all of you. But there's a pandemic and for the time being I have had to adjust in order to make my life less bad.

Ok, now it's your turn. How are you going to go with the current, accept the temporary miserable state of affairs and make your lives less bad? Starting today what are you going to temporarily do differently?

Wishing you realistic expectations and the flexibility of a gymnast,

Susan