

# TOUGH TIMES: 12 THINGS I HAVE LEARNED



**BY IAN SANDERS**

ONE

# KNOW WHAT YOU NEED

During times of uncertainty or struggle, I often draw on writer Enuma Okoro's advice. Pause for a moment, she says, put your hand on your heart, take a deep breath and ask yourself what you need right now. Being still and recentering myself in this way allows me to find what my body or mind is craving. What do you need right now?

**TWO**

# **TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME**

When overwhelmed, it can be hard to see clearly ahead. Focus instead on just making it through that day, or even the hour, or the next twenty minutes. Incremental steps are still taking you in the right direction.

**THREE**

# **LOOK FOR THE LIGHT WHEREVER YOU CAN FIND IT**

Literally and metaphorically. The late afternoon light shimmering on the kitchen wall. The kindness of a stranger during a hospital visit. An unexpected laugh-out-loud when you see where the dog has decided to snooze. A hug from Monika at the coffee shop. Allow these glimmering moments to warm you and remind you there is light even during the darkest of times.

## FOUR

# GET EMOTIONAL

I've cried more than I ever have over the last few months: tears of joy as well as desperation. And it feels good. Matt Berninger, lead singer of The National has written that in his early fifties it might just be that he's finally comfortable with himself enough to let it out. 'I've matured into a crybaby,' he says. What a wonderfully reassuring place to be.

**FIVE**

# **GET COMFORTED BY THOSE WHO CARE**

There's such kindness around. Friends both near and far, new and old, have let me know they've been thinking of me. Whether they gifted me a magazine subscription across the Atlantic, baked a cake from down the road, or just checked in via WhatsApp, their empathy and compassion has gone a long way in lifting me. It makes a huge difference to know others are rooting for you.

**SIX**

# **REDISCOVER THOSE MOMENTS OF YOU-NESS**

Listening to my favourite playlist again, picking up my camera, scribbling down ideas in my journal: when I felt a bit better and could return to those moments of Me. Then they've acted as an accelerator to get me in a better place.

## SEVEN

# CHOOSE HOW YOU SHOW UP

It's often said that it's not what happens to you but how you choose to respond that matters. I tuned into that, filling my journal with positive messages and notes to myself. I also screenshot supportive messages from friends and connections like Matt in NYC, himself going through a health crisis, who'd emailed 'Keep going baby.' I tried to keep that positive mindset.



## EIGHT

# ADMIT IT'S TOUGH

On the difficult days I tried not to fight it too much and accept how I was feeling. As Cali observed, it is important to 'honour what's now', simply acknowledging what you've gone through. And on days like that I'd just be kind to myself and curl up with an episode of The Bear.

**NINE**

# **STAY GRATEFUL**

I've kept up my Good Times list-making habit during this time. Some days I had very few entries; other days the list was longer. Regardless, it has been a reminder to scan the day for the positive and not to take the little things for granted.

TEN

# TEN STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

It dawned on me: part of being a good patient is patience! You can't rush getting better. In fact the opposite is true. And it was good to be reminded by my new friend Ian that sometimes your recovery will go backwards - it doesn't occur in a neat, straight line.

**ELEVEN**

# **FIND HUMOUR**

When Simon in the coffee shop misheard my news and asked for clarification - 'What? You've gone gangster?' - I roared out loud. And when Dave responded to my Instagram post with the words: 'Such horrible news, but a well written post!' I had to laugh.

**TWELVE**

# **DO NOTHING**

Just sit and be.  
Some days, that's enough.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian Sanders is a storytelling trainer, author and coach. He works with some of the world's leading organisations, creating positive change through the power of stories.

Resolutely independent, curious, open-minded and rebel-spirited - it's led to a pretty unconventional career. It's also given Ian a unique perspective on what makes people and organisations tick.

The author of five books on working life, his latest, *365 Ways To Have a Good Day*, is out now.

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