

The benefit of a survival mindset



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

In the many disciplines, sports, and careers I have been involved in over the years, I have always been told that everything is based around mental attitude. A perfect example comes from my charter boat days in the Florida Keys, on our 45-foot offshore boat, and it involved seasickness.

Seasickness is a terrible affliction, as anyone who has been there will testify. The only real cure is to sit on the shady side of a church, far off in the country, and miles away from the sea and boats. Seasickness can also be mental.

We would have fishing clients show up at the dock, first thing in the morning, and stare at the dock flags whipping in the wind. They would say something like, "I sure hope I don't get seasick out there today." They would convince themselves they were going to be seasick. The gods of the sea were never one to disappoint, and sure enough, the flatlanders would spend the entire day on the rail, emptying their stomach contents.

In the past, I have written about the survival rules of three. The first rule is you can only survive three seconds without hope. This has nothing to do with buying a lottery ticket and already assume the ticket is a loser. That falls under the "pessimist" category, of which yours truly, is a life member.

A reasonable without hope example would involve you hiking in grizzly bear country, and suddenly a big bruin locks onto you. He begins his charge from 50 yards, and considering he can cover that in 3 seconds, you have no hope of survival, and let him send you to paradise. Instead of admitting defeat, you should fight like you are the third monkey in line on the Ark, and it is beginning to rain.

Having the proper gear in your pack, and the skills to use them often make all the difference in surviving a life and death situation in the woods. First, you need the metal fortitude to survive the situation. Give up hope, and you will get a tombstone for your troubles, stay the course, and you will survive.

Start with having a tenacity, not just in survival, but in everything you do. Do



Some folks are seasick before they ever set foot on the boat because they have the wrong mindset. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

everything with a tenacity and you will achieve success. There are things that can wreak havoc with your tenacity, such as anxiety and depression. These feeling worsen the longer you are in the situation. Know they are present, and you can keep them at bay.

Fatigue is a major enemy of a positive mental outlook. It lowers your defenses, makes you less aware to danger, and causes a loss in judgment and reasoning. Always take the time to rest your brain and body.

The same can happen if you are injured or sick. Being stranded in the woods is bad enough, but add a busted leg to the mix, and you have a 3-alarm emergency. Keep your head and keep the attitude in check. Here is when having a strong work ethic can come into play.

Survival is hard work, just like any other job. If you have a strong work ethic, and get tough with the job, that attitude can carry you through the survival

situation, and even help overcome the injuries, if you work at it. Tend to your injuries, focus on not letting it get you down, and use your work ethic to push through.

Cold and heat are your enemies. In an emergency, shelter up as soon as possible. If you are cold, make a fire. When you are overheated, find some shade, and rest up. Address the elements before they become a problem. Again, use your survival mindset to focus on potential problems, and take decisive action before the problem becomes insurmountable.

Hunger and thirst are an enemy that can really depress your attitude. Find water as soon as you can and remember that food can wait. You can go weeks without food. Consider that you may be better off resting than wandering around looking for food. Finding the food may have used more energy than the food found can supply

you with. Again, control your thoughts.

Everyone has fears. Fear is a normal reaction for someone faced with an emergency in the wilderness. Fear usually depends on the individual rather than the situation faced. Fear can lead a person to panic or stimulate a greater effort to survive. The worst feelings to avoid are hopelessness and helplessness. Never let the idea of a complete failure cross your mind.

You are going to experience fear but use it to your advantage. Accept the fact that fear is a natural reaction to the situation and concentrate on making the best of your situation. Letting your imagination run away, imagining the worst case for everything, will defeat you. Keep your mind busy with small tasks will lessen the fears and prevent you from dwelling on it.

The most dangerous enemy to your survival mindset in an emergency is panic. Panic is the uncontrolled

urge to run away from all of this. Panic is triggered by the mind and imagination under stress. It is accelerated by injuries, fatigue, hunger, and thirst. Uncontrolled fear will turn into panic, making a bad situation become a tragedy.

Attack the fear before it becomes panic. Keep your cool by relaxing and looking at the brighter side of things. Look for little successes, like finding something to eat, having a warm fire, or finding shelter from the elements. It is the positive reinforcement you give yourself, and the constant reminder that the goal of survival is what you seek.

A sense of humor can be an asset. I am not suggesting you watch an episode of The Three Stooges, but humor can be therapeutic. A little dark humor to your situation can go a long way towards survival. First responders in high-stress, life threatening jobs often utilize "gallows humor" to help them push through bad

scenes, and yours truly is a major offender in that area.

Remember that hopelessness is the iceberg in front of your ship. Keep thinking about the things and people you value the most. The positive attitude and tenacity will keep you motivated to achieve survival. This is what survival mindset is all about. Don't convince yourself you are seasick before the boat leaves the dock.

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