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## **Staying Up When the Chips Are Down**

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The focus and conversation of friends, family, and the general community has recently taken a different turn. There is an air of collective concern and dampened spirits regarding the now universal shift in the economic climate. Reduction of income, loss of jobs and homes or fear of such has dynamited the security of many individuals and families, leaving them at ground zero--stunned and devastated. For many, the experience is surreal and they move through it with disbelief and confusion.

Young individuals, couples and families are struggling to make ends meet after job loss or reduction in work hours or income. Mid-lifers are watching helplessly as the retirement they worked years to accrue slowly evaporates along with their dreams of life filled with more leisurely pursuits. College students and recent graduates who operated on the premise that a degree would mean better jobs and a more secure future are now having to settle for any employment that will cover the student loans. Greater numbers of young adults are living with parents because they are unable to find employment and housing. According to a recent survey, more divorcing couples are living in separate bedrooms rather than different locations because they are unable to sell their homes.

How does one survive tough times without losing hope?

1. In difficult times, fear and anxiety can be paralyzing, preventing us from doing what is necessary to change the course. It can drain us of precious energy necessary to recovery from life's challenges. Stress takes a toll on our physical and emotional well-being, compromising our ability to generate solutions and make good choices. Be attentive to your body and take time to exercise, rest, and refresh. Keep a daily or weekly journal, writing about the difficult changes in your life and the emotions you are experiencing.
2. Acknowledge and grieve the losses. This may include loss of home, income, employment or loss of important relationships. The grieving process may involve stages of shock, denial, anger and acceptance. Once past the denial stage, productive anger and acceptance can help you move forward.
3. Reset priorities and decide what is really important. You may discover that caring relationships are far more valuable than things. If supportive friendships and family relationships are lacking, find ways to make new contacts that give you encouragement. Be a cheerleader for those around you. Avoid relationships that are toxic and nonsupportive.

4. Adversity is often the doorway to new opportunities. Challenging times call for flexibility and a willingness to do things differently. It takes courage to change the course when life has taken some difficult turns. Educate yourself about your situation and generate a number of possible solutions. Knowledge is a powerful tool that can help you make wise choices.
5. Be proactive by developing a viable step-by-step recovery action plan. Commit to the plan by putting it in writing and sharing it with someone who can be your encourager and cheerleader. Take it one day at a time, stay focused and keep your eye on your goals. Maintain a mental snapshot of the desired outcome.

Finally, don't underestimate yourself and your ability to overcome adversity. Throughout my thirty year history as a counselor, I have always been amazed at the resiliency and tenacity of the human spirit. It is said that when you get to the end of all the light you know and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things can happen: either you will be given something solid to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly. It may be time to fly.