

# Mindful Monday, September 21, 2020

*"Don't try to understand everything. Sometimes it not meant to be understood, just accepted."*  
- Unknown

Our current reality can be difficult to digest. Some of us can accept the current reality while some of us are fighting with it. Others may find they are doing both. There may be those who are optimistic a return to normal is right around the corner while others have more of a long view. In our second of two posts on this subject, we turn our attention to The Stockdale Paradox: The ability to have faith in your ability to prevail while confronting the facts of your reality.

Vice Admiral James Stockdale was shot down during the Vietnam War. Once captured, he spent eight years in a prison camp. Some of that time was spent in solitary confinement. For two years he was in leg irons. He was tortured several times. He did not know when he was getting out or if he would ever get home.

When asked how he dealt with his time as a prisoner of war he says he never lost faith in the end of the story. He never doubted that he would get out, that he would prevail and turn his experience into the defining event of his life.

The Stockdale Paradox was identified by Jim Collins after a conversation with the Admiral. There are two key parts to it, paradoxically you are able to retain the faith that you will prevail in the end regardless of the difficulties, while at the same time confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be.

When asked who did not survive being a prisoner of war, Stockdale said that those who were overly optimistic, the ones who said, *"we'll be out by Christmas or Easter or Thanksgiving,"* and these events would come and go and years would pass and still they were prisoners. He said those with this approach *"died of broken hearts."*

Stockdale says, *"This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."*

The takeaway here is both brutal and comforting.

Brutal in that the reality is we do not know when or how

the pandemic will conclude. This is very unnerving for a society that prior to this had a pretty good handle on the general timelines of things like flu season, holiday gatherings and the rhythm of life.

The comfort comes when we can simply say, *"Yes, this is happening."* If we move to a place where can accept our reality for what it is and never lose faith in our ability to come through it, we will prevail. It does not mean it will be easy. It does not mean we have to like it. It means we are living a paradox. But it can be done, and we can do it.

The links below connect you with articles and tools that may aid in framing and processing your current reality (they are the same as last week).

[Psychology Today article](#) (Accepting a Reality That Feels Unacceptable)

[INC article](#) (How to Accept Yourself, Your Life and Your Reality)

Mindful Monday from June 1, 2019, ([basic mindfulness practice and links to additional resources](#)).

