



ATTENTION NOT ENERGY

BY SHARON EAKES

When you face something unpleasant, give it your attention but not your energy.” This is one of the best pieces of advice I’ve ever received. I understand it to mean “don’t waste emotional capital.” How often do we get all upset, causing us lots of stress, only to discover we’ve made things worse instead of better?

When you face an unpleasant situation, such as

- your computer crashes
- you have to work with someone you don’t like
- you can’t find something
- you have so much to do you feel

totally overwhelmed

- you make a big mistake

say to yourself, “Here’s one of these situations that deserves my attention but not my energy. I am just not going to get all worked up about it, because it won’t help. Instead, I’ll focus on it constructively and respond one step at a time.”

There are actually two parts to this strategy:

1) Notice that you are in an unpleasant situation—many of us move through the world without noticing. Clues might be the tightening of your neck or jaw or belly, a

feeling of rising upset, even panic, or becoming reactive to everyone and everything around you.

2) Give the situation attention without emotional energy. This is made easier by practice. Some practice ideas include paying conscious attention to each step as you walk, concentrating on each movement as you mow the lawn or cook, and noticing exactly where you are minute to minute as you drive. ■

Sharon Eakes is a trainer and executive coach with Hope Unlimited. She has a background in psychology and management. For 25 years, she worked at Gateway Rehabilitation Center in western Pennsylvania, where she was the vice president of treatment programs.