

# Characteristics of Survivors Begins With C

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Dr. Julius Segal, psychologist and author of *Winning Life's Toughest Battles: Roots of Human Resilience*, has identified the strategies for coping with any trauma that distinguishes the victor from the victim. How do some people seem to manage to lead successful lives while others seem to be unable to respond effectively the remainder of their lives? His findings can be applied to any stressful situation, the death of a loved one, the onset of disease, losing one's employment, a divorce, etc. Each of the five characteristics of survivors begins with a "C":

## **COMMUNICATION:**

He found that one must find a way to share their loss with even one other person who has gone through a similar loss. Support groups are especially important. "People need to find a way, when beset by trauma, to find one human being who shares their loss," Segal stated. These groups also give participants a chance to exercise compassion - Segal's second "C".

## **COMPASSION:**

"There is definite evidence that reaching out to help others in need is not only ethically and morally right, but it also serves to sustain those in trouble. This is the first sign of healing, to move outside one's self," he said. "Prisoners of war who began to serve only their own interest and stopped sharing, even food, were those who succumbed. You begin to see everyone else as remote and sink into a shell and give up," he explained. "Compassionate behavior not only reduces stress, but also produces biochemical changes in individuals."

## **CONTROL:**

One of the most common statements made by those who face trauma, is that the world is spinning out of control. "People under stress and grief need to find one thing that they can control," he states. One prisoner of war would save scraps of food and when his captors came into his cell to interrogate him, he would ask them to be seated and offer them food -- as if he were in his own living room and he were in control.

## **A CLEAR CONSCIENCE:**

Suffering is universally accompanied by guilt. "There is hardly a case of bereavement where people do not feel some remorse, as if they had something to do with causing the death," he wrote. The first step in dealing with this guilt is to acknowledge that such feelings are universal. "The guilt is less severe when one knows it is a common occurrence," he said. In his book, Segal recommends taking definite and forceful action to obtain compensation for wrongful acts and to change society's tendency to blame the victim. "Another antidote for guilt is

hope," he wrote. "Such tenacious optimism can lead to physiological changes that improve the efficiency of the immune system's defense against toxins and disease."

### **CONVICTION:**

Countless individuals beset by anxiety and depression report that their lives are without meaning, Segal reported. "Our hunger for meaning is never more urgent than during a crisis," he wrote, adding, "When we can identify a rationale for our anguish, our capacity to endure is significantly increased." Finding a direction to turn one's grief into action is indeed healing. Starting a new support group for your loss maybe the answer. This action returns one to the first "C" of this article, COMMUNICATION.

-Quotes and information are taken from the Tucson Citizen article, "Conquering Trauma", February 19, 1991.

Janna Excell asks these question to survivors about the following article.

### **1. COMMUNICATION**

Who?

Where?

How?

Frequency of contact?

When?

Groups?

### **2. COMPASSION**

How can I help to change the lives of myself and others?

Who else is hurting in this situation?

How can I redirect my life to address this situation that leaves a legacy of compassion and assistance?

### **3. CONTROL**

What is my daily pattern?

Is it helpful or detrimental?

If it is not helpful, what must I change?

What else can I do to gain some control over my life?

How can I continue to make order from chaos?

If I cannot control anything else, what type of memory do I wish to leave as a legacy, to my children, family, friends, etc.?

### **4. A CLEAR CONSCIENCE**

What did I do right in this situation?

Acknowledge one's lack of control of other's behaviors.

Acknowledge that guilt is a universal feeling.

What action can I take that will help me feel hopeful again?

## **5. CONVICTION**

How can I use this stress as an opportunity?

How can I turn my loss into helping others?

How do I make this a meaningful part of my life?

Once again, what legacy do I wish to leave for others who experience this?