



(October 16, 2015)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee
National VA Council, President

~~~~~

**In This Briefing:**    **The Power of Expectations by Ron Culberson**

~~~~~

[The Power of Expectations](#)

Recently, I traveled from Redmond, OR to Denver, CO. Three hours before I was to depart, I was notified that my first flight was delayed and that I would arrive in Denver 25 minutes late. However, I only had 45 minutes to make my next flight to DC. If everything went according to this revised schedule, I would be left with 20 minutes to sprint 40 gates and weave in and out of all the people who would be in no rush to get to their flight thusly would be moving slower than snails on medicinal marijuana. Plus, my carry-on bag was too big for the fun-size plane in Redmond so I had to gate check it. That meant I would have to wait patiently for the ground crew to offload it before I could hustle to my second flight. The itinerary looked much less complicated when I booked the flight a month earlier.

But such is the world of the frequent flyer. I'm very accustomed to these nuances as part of my regular travel routine. And honestly, I don't typically get stressed out because it's the nature of the beast. If every little mishap bothered me, I would probably lose my cool on every

trip. And as a humorist who teaches stress management, it just ain't cool to lose my cool.



But I did notice something interesting about my thought processes during the Redmond trip. I discovered that my thinking began to negatively influence my pre-flight experience.

Let me explain.

Knowing that I was now going to be late to Denver, that I might miss my connection, and that my flight to DC was the last one that night, the likely outcome would be staying overnight in Denver. So, I began to “expect” the ramifications of this potential predicament.

I thought, I'll have to get a hotel in Denver. Dang it. Not another night away from home. The airline better pay for it. But wait, they only pay if it's a mechanical problem. They don't pay for weather delays. I wonder what kind of delay this is? Maybe I can go online and find out.

I spend 15 minutes online and I can't find out.

Then I wonder, OK, if I stay in Denver, I'll have to cancel my hotel in DC. Luckily, I used points to stay there. But wait, I've passed the cancellation deadline so they may not refund my points. Dang it. They better refund my points. I wonder what the policy is? Maybe I can find out online?

I spend 15 minutes online and I can't find out.

Then I wonder, I have a presentation in DC tomorrow night. If I can't get an early morning flight out of Denver, I'll be late getting there and will get stuck in rush-hour traffic. But wait, I left my suit for the presentation in my car at the airport. What if I don't have time to change

between the time I land and my presentation? I'll have to wear the jeans and shirt I have on now. But my shirt is starting to stink. I don't want to wear a stinky shirt to a presentation. I wonder if I'll have time to change? I think I'll eat a candy bar — that will make me feel better.

Do you see my point?

My rambling thoughts began to consume both my brain and my time as I imagined all of the possible outcomes — even though there was nothing I could do about any of it until I found out if I would actually miss my flight.

Well, as it turns out, our pilot, in true Captain James T. Kirk fashion, took us to Warp Factor 2 and we actually landed in Denver early. What a waste of some perfectly good worrying.

Our minds can be very noisy and much of that noise is focused on the anticipation of problems. Yet, as with my flight, these problems often don't materialize. If we don't quiet our minds, we spend a lot of time living in the stress of the chatter.

But what's an intelligent calm-craving person to do? How do we shut off the chatter?

Well, two of my favorite experts on this topic are Eckhart Tolle (author of [The Power of Now](#)) and Michael Singer (author of [The Untethered Soul](#)). Both have written about the problems we encounter when we live by our minds rather than in the reality of the moment. We have the ability to change our focus. We just need to, well, focus.

Remember when you learned to read? At first, you didn't recognize the words and had to sound out every syllable. Then, as you developed a feel for the patterns of the words and the sentences, your pace improved. Now, even if you're a slow reader, you go through words much more proficiently than when you first started. The same is true with calming the chatter in our minds. The more we practice, the better we get.

Here are a couple of techniques that can help you begin the process towards less chatter and more clarity.

First, pay attention to what you're thinking. Have you ever realized that you are actually thinking about thinking? For instance, let's say someone is rude to you. Rather than just reacting, have you ever noticed yourself watching your reaction, as if you were an observer to your own emotions? If so, then you are attending to what you're thinking. And if we can attend

to what we're thinking, then we have the ability to adjust what we're thinking. This is internal awareness and is the first step in calming the chatter.

A second suggestion is to consider practicing regular mindfulness-focused activities such as meditation or yoga. These activities are designed to help us integrate our spiritual and physical selves so as to find a more peaceful existence.

When I first learned about these practices, I admit that they seemed a bit like voodoo. I was skeptical because I didn't understand how they worked. I even suspected that they may have been propaganda perpetuated by LSD-induced thinking. But, in truth, they are based on principles that have been used effectively for hundreds of years and have been validated in current brain research. They can be very effective *if* you practice them regularly.

Last week, I had a flight from New Orleans through Charlotte to DC. At the same time, the southeast was getting hammered with rain and the effects of an offshore hurricane. Based on experience, I knew there was no way my flights would be on time. But I decided to practice calming that particular chatter and I focused on a good book instead (on mindfulness, coincidentally).

I arrived in Charlotte and mentioned to the gate agent that I was surprised my flight was on time. She said, "We haven't had a delay all day."

So there you go.

My mind wanted to create a problem. But no problem existed. We can spend so much of our available cognitive energy expecting problems when, as an alternative, we could seek clarity instead. The next time you have the choice, see if you can expect a better outcome.

[Click to comment or see previous posts.](#)

Ron Culberson, MSW, CSP, CPAE

Ron@RonCulberson.com

www.RonCulberson.com