



LIVE IN THE NOW

I walked into an exam room the other day to find an elderly couple laughing, joking, and conversing intently with each other. After introducing myself and examining their eyes, I learned that they were both 95 years old and had been married for more than 70 years. Neither presented with any significant ocular pathology or visually significant cataract. They were also not taking any medications and did not have any other major health issues. I was interested in their story, and for the following 15 minutes we had a vibrant, wide-ranging conversation about politics, health, finance, marriage, children, and more.

Naturally, I needed to ask them about their secret to health and success because, as we all know, it is so rare to come across a 95-year-old healthy, happy, articulate, sharp-as-a-tack couple. Their response was not complicated or magical; it was simply to live in the moment and enjoy what you do as much as you can, every second of the day, and live a stress-free life.

Over the next few days, I started to think about all of the responsibilities and challenges we face, and how often our minds tend to wander from the present moment to things that are either behind us or lie ahead of us. We seldom experience stress when we focus directly on what is in front of us in the moment, but this is difficult to accomplish.

As surgeons, it often seems that the only time we can let go of the past is when we operate, and sometimes only when we perform a complex procedure that requires 110% of our attention. It is only then that we are truly able to clear our minds of all other things except for what is directly in front of us.

It would be nice to apply this energy to all aspects of our lives. I have found that, when I am able to be in the

moment and bond with patients in the exam room, it leads to better relationships and more success for me in the practice. Similarly, when I engage with my staff—either on a personal or work-related level—I form a more meaningful, trusting relationship with them. Achieving this type of mentality is much easier said than done, however. It takes diligence and hard work to live this way.

Physician burnout is on the rise. The demands of a growing number of responsibilities in patient care, compliance with electronic health records and government regulations, rising costs of operations, and higher patient expectations challenge one's focus and concentration. It is difficult to remain positive and focus on the moment in front of us when there are many other stressors that occupy mental space.

The silver lining is that most of us love ophthalmology, and we love what we do. Our profession is a true source of happiness and a path to a more stress-free life. Hopefully, with time, we can all learn to focus more on the present and, in turn, handle the challenges in front of us with greater ease.

In the words of Steve Jobs, "Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking." ■

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Weinstock". The signature is stylized and fluid.

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