

The battle in your brain

by St John Craner

Environmental challenge is a much wider concept when you think about it. The biggest environmental battle you face is the one inside your own head.

It's the environment you live in day in, day out. Author Robin Sharma said, "The mind is a great servant but a terrible master" so it makes sense to master it, rather than let it master you.

Our beloved East Coast has been hit hard by Cyclone Gabrielle. The resilience of our rural communities is amazing to witness: a

Churchillian, Herculean effort where locals have banded together on the big clean-up.

At this time it's important as we physically rebuild that you, dear reader, take the time out to mentally rebuild too.

No one has waited for their insurance company to pay out because they wanted to take action and gain some control over their damaged lives. It's human nature when Mother Nature shows us who's boss, to try to take some power back.

Taking action and making progress is what keeps us humans motivated. Even when the

going's tough as it is now, progress — however small — must be celebrated. It's positive mental fuel and momentum that keeps us going.

So much of farming and life is uncontrollable. We can't control what happens to us but we can try to take control of how we respond to it.

Doug Avery is 100 percent on the money when he talks about the top paddock being the most important paddock.

It all starts with yourself and those top two inches.

They say those who need the most love have the worst way of showing it — and a problem shared is a problem halved.

Telling people who care about you how you feel will help you navigate these challenging times. The more they know, the better they can respond (they aren't mindreaders!).

After almost three years of Covid disruptions and now a national emergency, people are justifiably feeling burnt out, especially those who live off and on the land.

I'll admit that if it wasn't for being physically fit I think I would have burned out in the last three years because body and brain are inextricably linked.

And here's the thing:

How you think and respond to events in your own head is where you win or lose.

The mindset and internal narrative you choose is crucial.

Victor Frankl, Holocaust survivor, said: "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

The past three years for me have seen my father die on the farm back in the UK, from a brain tumour in three weeks flat (our mandatory quarantine system prevented me from getting there and a dilapidated Covid NHS system in the UK meant he didn't get access to the treatment he needed early enough), marriage separation and all the trials and tribulations of Covid thrown in.

The battle in my brain has been vital for me to focus on.

Some call it mental toughness, mental fitness or resilience.

I simply call it self-care. By that I mean

- looking after yourself, like
- eating well
- making sleep a priority
- exercising daily
- surrounding yourself with the right people (who you feel safe with and have good

energy)

- not doom-scrolling social media
- being mindful of your alcohol consumption
- making a conscious decision to consume the right content

If you don't care for yourself, you can't care for anyone else. This is the reason the airlines always tell you to put your oxygen mask on yourself first.

Physical fitness is one thing, mental fitness is another.

So I'm writing this to any of you who might be struggling right now.

Tell your inner negative narrative and voice to take a hike.

Don't listen to it. Give it a terrible name so you label it and are aware of it. And then tell it to bugger off! If the way we speak to someone was the same way we often speak to ourselves I reckon some of us would be locked up!

That negative inner voice won't serve you.

Instead focus on what you can control — the upsides, the positive things and all the things you can be grateful for — health, family, friends, hobbies, interests and fitness.

Starting small helps.

The hardest is always the inner work. It's also the most important work.

Big muscles get you physical parity and closed, staunch personas get you only so far.

There's a big reason why top athletes like the All Blacks have mental coaches.

It gives them a psychological edge to deal with the constant pressure they face in the arena when they are expected to continually perform.

None of us is any different and you needn't struggle alone.

We need our food-producing farmers more than ever and we need you because you matter.

Take care of yourself first and foremost.

Note: if you're

struggling, reach out

to the wonderful

people at Rural

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all of us: 0800 787

254, rural-support.

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