

# Two Words to Start the Day With in Challenging Times

## Key points

At some stage we all die.

Acknowledging that death is inevitable helps us value the time we have.

People who recognise that death is inevitable were more likely to show concern for others.

The pandemic has led many to be more appreciative.

Amor Fati is having a mindset for making the most of anything that happens.

We cannot control many things in life but we can control how we feel about them.

Sad but true – we all have a Use By Date. Whilst we don't like to think about it, it is inevitable. At some stage we are all going to die. In *"The Comfort Crisis"* author Michael Easter quotes researchers from the University of Kentucky who had people think about death and the result was...they got happier. The scientists concluded, *"Death is a psychologically threatening fact but when people contemplate it, apparently the automatic system begins to search for happy thoughts."*

Easter notes that it is similar to being on holiday. If you obsessively dwell on your holiday ending (yes we will be able to travel again in the future), it is depressing and isn't helpful. However, acknowledging that the holiday will finish helps you to better appreciate the opportunity to sleep in, enjoy the beauty of a beach walk, appreciate a barista coffee on demand and all of the luxuries of a holiday because you don't delude yourself into thinking it's forever. You don't take it for granted, you savour it. This leads to you making better choices about what to do during your week of holidays because you don't want to waste it. You focus on what's important. You acknowledge that time is limited so you want to make the most of it.

The scientists at the University of Kentucky wrote that when people were prompted to think about their death they were more likely to show concern for people around them. They did things like donate time, money and their own blood to blood banks. They were more likely to be grateful and appreciative for what they have.

The pandemic has been a rude wake up call for all of us. Whilst it has been very challenging, many have gained appreciation for what we have when we are not in lockdown. Things that we may have taken for granted before the pandemic.

**The funny thing about facing imminent death is that it snaps everything else into perspective.**

James Patterson

Whilst thinking about our death is morbid and uncomfortable, the discomfort can spur us to live better, to make the most of it because some day you will die. Author of *"The Daily Stoic"*, Ryan Holiday advocates for loving everything in your life – including the truly awful stuff - by starting each day with two words – Amor Fati.

Holiday defines Amor Fati as *"a mindset that you take on for making the best out of anything that happens. Treating every moment – no matter how challenging – as something to be embraced, not avoided. To not only be okay with it but love it and be better for it. So that like oxygen to a fire, obstacles and adversity become fuel for your potential"*.

Given the unpredictability of working in schools especially at the moment (you are unlikely to be bored as no two days are the same and some crazy things happen in schools), taking on the mindset of Amor Fati has huge potential. Whilst it is profound it is VERY difficult.

A useful strategy for enacting the Amor Fati mindset is to recognise that much of your life is not under your control. You can't control the world or other people. Often you can't control what is going on in your head. The only thing you can control is your deliberate thoughts and actions. We often unconsciously default to thinking that we have control over everything – and then we are angry or frustrated when the universe quickly reminds us that we don't. We cannot control most things but we can control how we feel about them by changing our expectation that we are entitled to have everything go our way all of the time. Try taking difficulties for granted instead of the pleasures. Accept them. Love them as challenges that can help us grow.

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