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useless regrets

Regrets are not only the saddest but also the most destructive feelings. Ideas in psychology have shown that people think about reality based on their feelings rather than on reality itself.

According to Nathan S. Kline, M.D., it's quite natural to feel regretful at times. In fact, we learn by making mistakes. Once a student fails a test, he learns about what he should've done to pass it. However, you have to be careful because overthinking the past can paralyze people so that they can't get on with the present. Arthur Freeman and Rose DeWolf have labeled this process "woulda/ coulda/ shoulda thinking."

They say, "Instead of saying 'I should've done better,' " they recommend, "Write down what steps you exactly needed to take to perform better. Then you'll most probably realize that such steps couldn't be taken at the time."

So that strategy and other strategies like writing down your mistakes and saying them out loud will help us realize that most of our regrets are really illogical. For example if you write down things as simple as not speaking formally to your boss, then you're probably mistaken because things like that cannot really make you lose your job, etc. Once you realize the illogic in your regrets, you'll be able to get on with the present.

After you realize that and go on, it's time to solve the problems that lie ahead of you. An Italian proverb says, "When the ship has sunk, everyone know how they could've saved it."

1. What have new ideas in psychology shown?

They have shown that people think about reality based on their feelings.

2. Is it unusual to feel deep regret according to Nathan?

No, according to Nathan it's not unusual to feel regretful.

3. How do mistakes help us?

Mistakes help us learn.

4. What are the harmful effects of thinking too much about past mistakes?

Overthinking the past can paralyze people so that they can't move on with their lives.

5. What do Freeman and DeWolf suggest?

They suggest we write down what is an example of a way in which we could've performed better in the past.

6. How does Freeman and DeWolf's suggestion help us?

It helps us realize that most of the things we think we should've done could not actually be done at the time. So with that mindset we won't feel as regretful.

7. How can you see the illogic in your regrets?

By writing them down and saying them out loud, or better yet recording them while saying.

8. What is the next step after realizing how illogical your regrets are?

The next step is take action to solve the problems you face right now and get on with the present.

9. Why was the mother's regret illogical?

Because even if she had been there in the football stadium, she couldn't have done anything useful for her son.

10. Could the mother really prevent the injury?

No, she couldn't.

11. What does the Italian proverb mean?

It means to get on with the present and not to think about what's finished.

12. What is "woulda/coulda/shoulda thinking?"

It's thinking too much about past mistakes and missed opportunities.