

Focus on the known | Christin Smith Myers

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This spring I heard a keynote speech presented by Elina Fuhrman, who is also known as [Soupelina](#). When she was talking about the steps she took after being diagnosed with cancer, she emphasized her decision to "focus on the known." I've thought of that advice many times since then, and I think of it from two different perspectives.

First, this advice reminds me to emphasize what's known, not what is unknown. Spend time on "what is" than on "what if." I think of what Oprah writes on the last page of each issue of O Magazine: "What I know for sure." Think of this scenario, in which someone has received a dreaded diagnosis:

- I know I have cancer.
- I know I have a good doctor.
- I know my spouse will support me.
- I know I have two friends who have been through chemo with whom I can speak honestly.
- I know my boss is flexible about my hours.
- I know I'm going to experience a lot of pain and I'm scared about that.

When you focus on the known, you often identify a lot of positives in your situation as well. I've read the happiness research that tells us that we have the power in any given situation to consciously select a counterfactual that makes us feel fortunate rather than helpless. Choosing a positive counterfactual sets us up for a host of benefits to motivation and performance that accompanies a positive mindset. So when you focus on the known, include the negative and the positive.

The second way I look at "focus on the known" is with an emphasis on "focus." It's our responsibility to focus on what is known, instead of hiding from it. I remember talking to a friend when my husband was considering becoming a stay-at-home dad. She said something like, "There's no way to predict how it will work out financially." And I thought, "Well, I have a record of what our bills have been, and I know how much is in my paycheck, and I know how much he won't be making, so actually, it is fairly predictable." If you can't face it, you can't fix it; if you can face it... well, you get the idea.

So next time you are faced with a challenging situation or difficult decision, focus on the known.