

Patience for Welfare: Acquiring Skills to Deal Calmly with the Difficulties of Everyday Life

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Received: September 17, 2019; **Published:** October 17, 2019

Abstract

In this article I want to present some ideas that I have learned about the concept of patience. Although it is not a very popular construct in psychology, anyway, I think it can be of great importance, especially for those people who seek to optimize their cognitive performance and psychological abilities in their daily activities. First I want to start by telling you what it means to be patient and why it is important to acquire this ability. Then I will show you what situations can lead us to be impatient and what could be an inappropriate path to gain patience. Finally, I will propose a series of steps or principles that will help you proceed patiently. I am convinced that this ability will help you develop more effective strategies to face those situations in which impatience usually takes away the “control of command” of your behaviors.

Keywords: *Patience; Welfare; Skills; Habits; Proactive Behavior*

Why is the concept of Patience important?

Patience is a concept that we usually use to communicate in everyday life. Imagine for example a conversation in which a coworker comments in an informal talk that he is interested in learning a new language and asks for advice on what is the most effective method to achieve it (for example, taking a course with a teacher, buying a application, travel where that language is spoken, etc.). It is quite likely that many give their own opinions, suggest one or another action to follow, recommend avoiding this or that other, but regardless of what each one says almost everyone will agree that they should have patience, that a language is not learned From one day to the next, there will be times when you will advance a lot and others when you will have to wait to see significant progress. So we can also imagine many other similar conversations such as when someone must learn a new trade, adapt to a new way of working, learn to drive, change the method of study at the university, start doing physical activity, etc. In each of these cases, it will almost always be agreed that patience is an important element to reach a successful conclusion. Even if someone says that during the development of any of these skills, he is getting impatient, naturally the idea will arise that he should calm down, know how to wait, calm down and persevere without “losing his mind.” Anyway, no matter what you do, you will have to do it patiently.

In all these cases, expressing that one must have patience presupposes that we all know that the achievement of an expected result after the application of a given action is not immediate, that the success of our actions requires time and that this time is often greater than we would like or wish. We can also intuitively know that we should not judge the outcome of our actions by the immediate consequence, that

many processes require time and that becoming impatient can make things worse. However, it must happen to you like most people that life in the world today (particularly in urbanized cities) demands and demands that you meet multiple and varied demands. Possibly it happens to you that you listen and receive multiple explicit or implicit messages that make you feel that you have to achieve achievements and results in the short term; the world seems to tell you that your Efforts should translate into tangible and immediate gratifications: You start with a diet and if the results are not noticed on a weekly basis, that makes you think that then it does not work, if you double the training hours you hope to improve your performance in the next competition , if you spend more hours studying for college you would have to get better grades in the next evaluations; and when such results are not obtained your belief scheme will make you think that your efforts have been in vain. There is something curious about this, because even if an internal voice tells you that the effort was worth it anyway, the strength of the belief that it was necessary to obtain a positive result after the effort usually prevails. Consequently, ideas will appear that will tell you that perhaps you should abandon such efforts, that the effort was in vain, among others.

At this point you may have noticed the contradiction that arises when, on the one hand we see that on multiple occasions we must be patient to wait for the desired results and, on the other hand, we feel compelled to judge or value our efforts for the bonuses obtained in the short term. In other words, we know that on many occasions we should be patient, wait calmly to obtain a certain achievement, overcome an adverse event or situation of suffering and, on the other hand, we are immersed in a social model that does not look forward to waiting of the perks and rewards for our efforts. This dilemma, whether we are aware or not, is constantly present and very often tests our ability to be patient. Let's see, then, what is specifically to have patience and what can we do to acquire it.



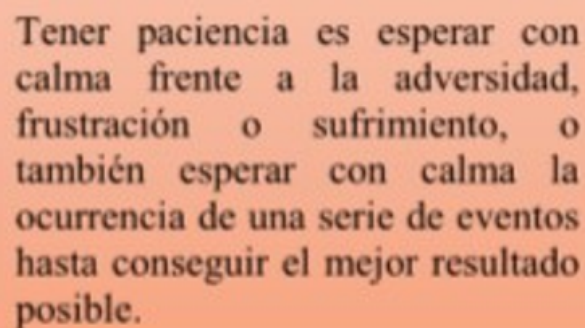
Figure 1

In 2012, Sarah Schnitker of Pasadena School of Psychology published a very interesting study in which two groups were compared, one received training to improve patience and the other did not [1]. The training consisted of exercises to improve awareness about positive and negative emotions, meditation practices, learning of emotional regulation strategies, exercises to improve coping with situations of interpersonal stress, development of empathy and compassion. Strategies for managing frustration and changing perspective on certain situations were also taught. The results obtained showed that the group that received the training achieved significantly greater increases than the other group in both patience and well-being. This indicates that patience can be trained and improved. The same researcher says that “It is easier and more satisfactory for patients to find goals to achieve greater well-being, especially when they face difficulties and obstacles”.

What is patience?

You probably have the concept of patience in mind almost every day, even so, it can happen to you that if you try to define it with precision it will be difficult for you. I will try to define what it is and why it is important to develop this skill. There is a definition that

says being patient means waiting calmly in the face of adversity, frustration, or suffering; or how I like to define it to myself: calmly wait for the occurrence of a series of events until the best possible result is achieved. As you can see, both definitions refer to waiting calmly. This that could seem obvious and elementary hides an enormous complexity that is necessary to decompose, understand and know how to elaborate. This concept requires incorporating multiple knowledge that psychology and neuroscience have so that you can develop this ability. However, this available knowledge is not always accessible if you are not part of the specialized public in these disciplines, unfortunately, from my point of view science suffers from a total inoperance in what is the department of “marketing and advertising”, this It makes a big gap between what science knows and what the general public receives. Part of the objective of this article will be to introduce you to some basic ideas and in a simple language, concepts and strategies that will allow you to acquire new habits with which to face the moments that require you to be patient.



Tener paciencia es esperar con calma frente a la adversidad, frustración o sufrimiento, o también esperar con calma la ocurrencia de una serie de eventos hasta conseguir el mejor resultado posible.

Figure 2

The ability to wait calmly is affected by multiple variables, as Buehler Griffin and MacDonald [2] and Byram [3] found in two studies, which participants who received a monetary incentive to perform a faster task underestimated in to a greater extent the time it would take them to complete the task, that is, increased their impatience. However, the incentive had no effect on the speed and real time with which it really took to complete the task. Therefore, the greater the incentive to finish a task quickly, the greater underestimation of the time required to complete it and the less patience that will be experienced.

The first thing I want you to keep in mind is that patience is an active behavior or rather proactive, since waiting calmly is not the same as other ways of waiting. For example, we all have, to a greater or lesser extent, the ability to inhibit certain impulses that are activated in the face of certain stimuli, such as being, seeing and wanting to eat a chocolate bar since I find myself on a hypocaloric diet. Perhaps in that situation you can avoid falling into such temptation and abandon the idea of grabbing it and eating it, but surely you will feel anxiety, frustration or irritability. Your mind faces a very elementary dilemma, if you eat the chocolate bar you will get a pleasant feeling close to happiness, however, if I do not eat it and keep my diet I will get a more distant satisfaction in time that will be for example feeling healthier or aesthetically more compliant with my body. As you have observed, inhibiting the impulse does not directly lead to what the definition of patience referred to as waiting calmly. This explains that applying patience is not the same as knowing how to inhibit an impulse. They are two different processes: Inhibition means simply being able to wait or let an emotion pass, but not necessarily calmly, instead, patience is proactive behavior, a process that requires a series of actions that allow you to achieve and maintain that calm.

From the point of view of the functioning of our neurophysiological system, the brain acts differently when we try to inhibit an impulse compared to when we try to act patiently. In the case of inhibition, it mainly uses an area known as the orbitofrontal cortex (which is the lower part of the prefrontal cortex). This area of the brain tries to stop the impulses that come from the region of the brain where our

emotions are activated (our “emotional brain”, responsible for generating automatic behaviors). On the other hand, several centers of the prefrontal cortex are activated for patience that strategically deactivate this emotional brain to redirect it towards a certain emotion, instead of trying to “slow it down”. To understand it better, we can compare it with the operation of a car. The accelerator of the car increases the speed in a similar way to how the emotional brain activates a certain emotion. If at any given time our car accelerates automatically, we would have two alternatives, one is to try to slow it down (inhibition) and the other is to slow down the car and redirect it calmly to a certain place (patience). Something that I always explain in the office is that the orbitofrontal cortex has limited energy, and when exhausted it loses all the braking capacity. So, to regulate our emotions, the problem of following this braking strategy is that, if the car does not stop slowing down, the brakes will overheat and sooner or later they will stop working, something that would cause our car to increase its speed in an uncontrolled way. . This is the case of the appearance of impulsive behaviors such as the known “binge eating” of food. Therefore, we must “teach” our brain to use the emotional brain deactivation strategy, something that involves the development of patience skills. This mode of operation is called “Executive Functions”, a very interesting construct that I will describe in future articles.

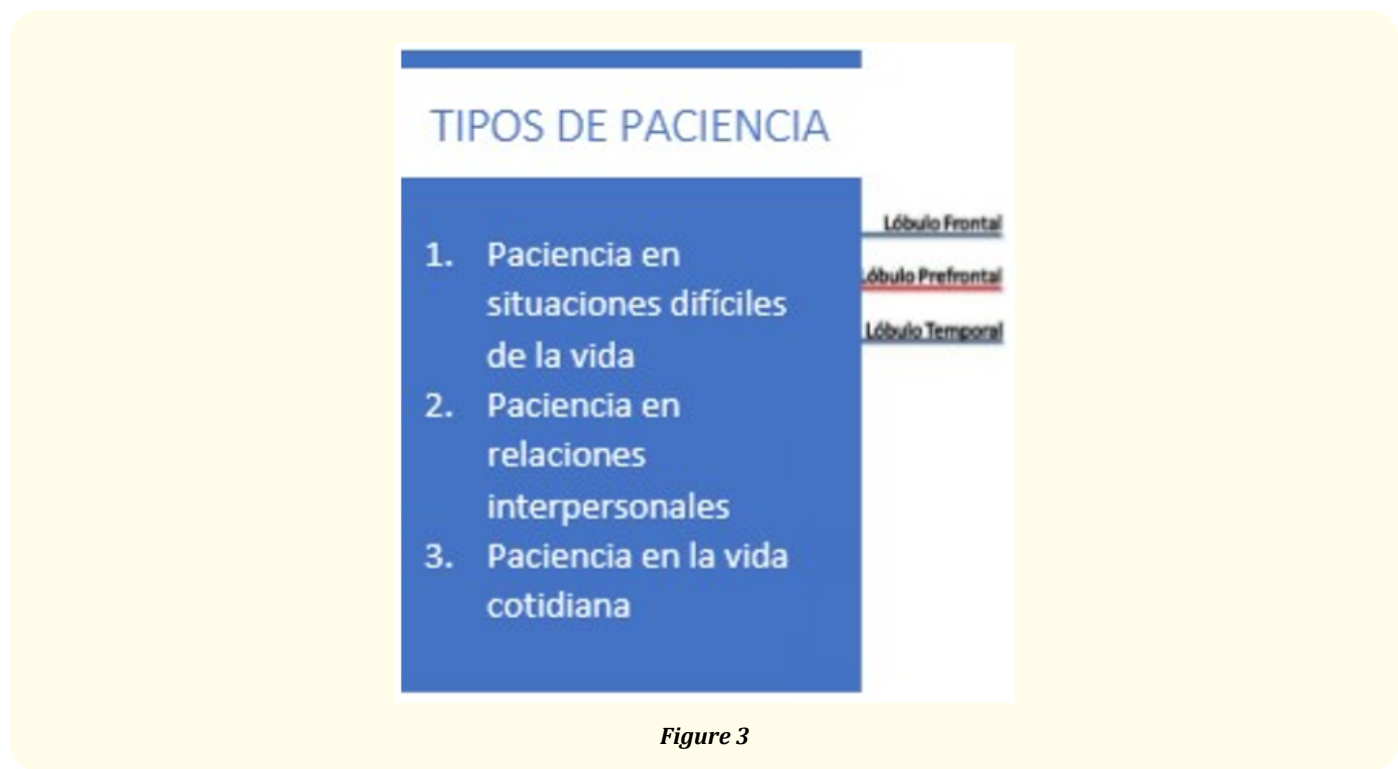


Figure 3

To help you see the world of patience better, I propose that you classify it into three types: 1) Patience in difficult life situations, such as pursuing a university career, going through a duel, facing a serious or chronic illness, working in a personal project, among many others, 2) Patience in interpersonal relationships, for example when we are forced to deal with difficult people in a job, in the family, in the neighborhood, also when we have to improve a relationship in a couple, friendship, family bond, and 3) Patience in everyday life, such as doing paperwork, taking a trip, facing adverse climates, managing our finances, waiting for test results, etc.

Let’s now look at a case in which the need to apply these three types of patience is revealed. Luciano is 36 years old and works in a public institution in the area of institutional relations. He studied international relations and has a master’s degree in business management (MBA). His professional goal is to have his own business, but he has not yet been able to start with this project because

he has had different family problems that have forced him to continue his work in a dependency relationship, something that assures him a monthly salary and some others Benefits. Luciano arrives at the office unmotivated, exhausted and somewhat depressed. In the consultation he recounts several situations where he has had to stop negative emotions in his work. For example, he says that his boss usually assigns cadet tasks, such as sending him to buy bills and organizing the meeting room. On other occasions you must attend very tedious and boring meetings where you usually remain silent and making a great effort for not reveal your bad mood or boredom. He feels useless, considers that his tasks have no meaning or any institutional impact, spends hours doing repetitive and tedious activities such as filling out documentation and other bureaucratic tasks of that kind. It is not difficult to imagine that Luciano, in the years he has this job, has had to inhibit a lot of emotions, which has led him to feel very tired and worn out. On the other hand, she knows that if she refuses her boss's requests or confronts her, she can lose the benefit of the flexibility of schedules she currently enjoys, she would have to spend more hours in the office and not have time to study. He has learned that "slowing down" prevents him from worsening his problems, what he has not yet been able to solve is to manage the enormous wear and tear that this entails. Luciano needs to learn patience skills, instead of slowing down or inhibiting, he must learn strategies to increase the well-being of waiting until he can start his personal entrepreneurship. It is not about adopting a passive waiting position, nor of learning to constantly control oneself against the many situations that wear it out; Being patient as we said is a proactive attitude.

How to develop skills to be more patient?

Knowing what is not the same as knowing how. One of the most fascinating lessons in my career was knowing that psychological or mental skills are trained in the same way as a sports skill, and patience is no exception. I remember in my high school years when we were training for handball, that the practice had a very definite sequence. The teacher always repeated the same sequence of actions: he put us in line (we stopped doing other activities), he explained the exercise (theoretical part), he showed it (he modeled the action with an example), we did it (we executed the action), we practiced it several times (repetition of the action), and it corrected us (it offered us feedback). I still have the memory of the wear on my shoulder that meant throwing me hard again and again to the goal. In this context of the practice of a sport, it would not occur to anyone that it would reach only with the verbal explanation so that we master the technique. However, for some reason, in the world of patience (and in many other psychological domains) we tend to believe that it is only with theory that it is, or worse, that knowing the root cause of why we are not patient will suffice. So, we learn to be. If you enter theoretical discussions, what I am proposing to you is that the first step in managing your patience is that you think of it as a skill that you must train, more precisely a cognitive ability. Another distinction that is important to consider is that it is also not useful to think of patience as a moral virtue. Moral virtues include behaviors that are chosen to comply or not. On the other hand, in the case of patience, it is not enough with a single decision, but in order to acquire it is necessary that you fulfill a sequence, as well as the steps that my gym teacher did to me when training us to play handball. I am going to propose a series of steps that if you train them you will be able to generate the coping behaviors and styles that are required to acquire this ability to have patience.

One last clarification before seeing the sequence of steps. The training of this skill is context dependent. That is, patience always depends on a particular situation or environment. In my case, I could go from being enormously patient with my patients, but I cannot necessarily apply it to my mother, with whom I could be super impatient. With this I want to tell you that training should be thought and focused on an area or domain of your life; nobody becomes patient for all and each of the possible situations. Try an area of your life, then, you can extend it to other areas, but remember that there can always be a person or situation that is your "kryptonite" and deactivate all your powers.

A possible patience training model

There are several training models to develop patience. The model that I will recommend in this case consists of 5 steps. Although the model is a theoretical construction, each step has an empirical basis, that is, it has research that proved its effectiveness.

The steps to gain patience are as follows:

1. Notice the impatience.
2. Stop the thought or action process.
3. Identify impatience triggers.
4. Evaluate the circumstances.
5. Decide between actively intervening or actively waiting.



Figure 4

Notice the impatience

The first skill to develop is to realize that you need to be patient. This at first will not be something that happens automatically, therefore, you should strive to monitor and detect that you are impatient. This requires a state of consciousness that implies the constant self-observation of your thoughts, attitudes and bodily sensations. You must imagine that you placed an external camera that constantly observes you in a neutral way, that is, it shows you what is happening and not what you think is happening. This is something important, because perhaps from the camera you can see that you are tense, that you are quieter or more answering, that your legs are restless, that your breathing has become very irregular, etc., and perhaps you subjectively have not perceived that you are irritable or anxious, that they are symptoms that indicate that you are impatient. To practice this point, one possibility is that you use pencil and paper, assemble a grid with the symptoms that indicate your impatience and at different times of the day you score 1 to 5 each of them. When you notice that two or more symptoms score at a value of 3 or more this will be an indicator that you are impatient, and you will have to move immediately to the second step.

Stop the thought or action process

When you notice that you are impatient, the next point is to stop the thoughts and actions that, if followed, would only make things worse. This ability consists in getting a pause to activate, what in Neurosciences are called the Executive Functions. These functions are those that facilitate self-control and goal-directed behavior. There are two basic tools to achieve this: the first is to focus attention on one point, for example, breathing, and the second is to change the action or get out of the situation. For example, let's imagine that you are at your store arguing with a client and notice that your impatience has exceeded the level established in the previous point. At that time, you can apply a first tool that consists in starting to focus your attention on breathing, putting the focus of your awareness on the abdomen,

how the air enters and leaves the lungs, etc. At this time, it is not important that Try to change the way you breathe, just focus on the process. The second tool you could apply is to ask him for a few minutes to call him again or leave the counter for a while and then resume the conversation, that is, change the action.

Evaluate the circumstances

This tool is evaluative and facilitates us to reach conclusions. The goal is to have the right information to know what is the best course of action to respond patiently. This point involves the answer to a series of questions. The first one is: Is the impatience consistent with the situation? This means that there is a certain relationship between the situation that activates impatience and impatience itself. For example, there is a huge difference between getting irritable, tense or nervous about the lack of money at the ATM, compared to a situation where your child should be surgically operated urgently. With this I want to tell you that you must learn to distinguish when your impatience is disproportionate or not. If the answer to the question is that impatience is not consistent with the situation, this will indicate that you must intervene in order to acquire more patience. If, on the contrary, impatience has been activated in the face of an event that would make most human beings impatient, then perhaps the strategy is to manage impatience so as not to make the situation worse. Another critical question to answer is: is the situation controllable or not? For example, let's think about a situation where I find myself unexpectedly with a lot of traffic or a complete blockage on a highway following an accident. This event is a clear trigger for impatience in most people, especially if you have something very important to do and cannot be postponed. Undoubtedly, here the situation is not controllable, there is nothing I can do to change what is happening, therefore, it would not be useful to perform actions such as honking or shouting at drivers, since most likely this would put me more impatient and lose the possibility of analyzing those actions that could effectively apply to acquire greater patience. Nor would it be a very effective ability to try to control my impatience by stopping my frustration or anger, because in the short or medium term, this mental brake will stop working and you will enter a free fall towards a great variety of impulsive behaviors that will make things worse. If the situation is controllable, that is, there are concrete actions that could change the events that trigger your impatience. The problem that usually happens is most of the situations that activate our impatience are uncontrollable and our cognitive system tends to see most of the situations as controllable. Therefore, answering this question correctly will be crucial.

Decide between acting or waiting

Once the first four skills have been applied, I can make decisions about whether to act or wait. The decision to wait this is the case of those situations where letting things happen without active intervention will solve the problem. In the case of traffic, we will have to wait for public entities to free the highway for cars to pass. It is worth clarifying that, at this point, waiting does not mean waiting passively but quite the opposite, waiting but taking actions that help me achieve the necessary calm. Like my friend María Eugenia, who does Home Office (work from home) and if she needs to wait for the answer about a problem, use that time to clean the house. Also, in these cases you can practice other skills such as activating positive thoughts, giving you gratifications, seeking new learning, practicing meditation, etc.

The decision to act is when active intervention can solve the problem. In the case of the accident, it could be to contact the person we were going to meet to anticipate the delay, offer to cancel the meeting with some anticipation, maybe make the meeting by phone, etc. It is worth clarifying at this point, that acting implies a certain degree of mastery of impatience, since, if your negative emotions are over-activated, you should first intervene on them. For example, if I am very angry, I must first think about how I can do to calm my anger, or in the case of being very scared I would have to do something to lower my fear, since fear can paralyze me and make me make bad decisions or act inappropriately Therefore, it is always important that you practice this sequence in order, without skipping steps and not moving forward until you are sure that you have mastered the previous steps.

Identify impatience triggers

This skill is critical, and it is advisable to elaborate it out of the moments in which your impatience has been activated. Find a quiet place and take the time to review the mental images of events, either with the eye of the mind or in writing to find and know what are the events

that could be the triggers of your impatience. Emotion experts call this process chain analysis. This would be as if we were reproducing the camera recording of the first point and trying to discover when our impatience was activated and what were the circumstances that generated it. The triggers of impatience can be a person or a group of people, situations, external events, bodily sensations, or thoughts. The objective of this phase is not to seek to draw conclusions, it is only about knowing better what are the critical events that act as triggers of impatience in order to be alert in certain situations that you already notice that will require the application of this sequential model [4-10].

Conclusion

The first purpose of this article is that you can rethink many of the problems you usually face as difficulties in responding patiently to situations that usually make you impulsive, irritable, tense or anxious. A second objective is that when they think of being patient you represent a set of actions to act calmly to certain stimuli and stop trying to deal with them with the lousy inhibition strategy. The last objective has been to show you that the acquisition of this skill can be trained and for this we review a possible model of how to carry out such training. As you can imagine, patience, like any other skill cannot be acquired from one moment to another, requires a trial and error process, and in which, regardless of redundancy, you must have patience.

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Volume 8 Issue 11 November 2019

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