

P.E.D.S. - Understanding the psychology of Post-Election Distress Syndrome

By Dwight Bain, Nationally Certified Counselor

A major election leads to major change- psychologically that is. No matter who wins an election, the unexpected emotional let down or explosive reaction after the ballots are counted can be overwhelming to many, especially the aged or over-involved who can be set up for crushing amounts of what I call **P.E.D.S. or Post-Election Distress Syndrome**.

This election has likely been the most stressful of any during our lifetime because of numbing news fatigue and continual media over-exposure, yet the real problems are yet to come. Personal anxiety, professional panic and poorly thought out decisions are on the horizon regardless of your political persuasion.

Why such a gloomy projection?

It's based on how this election process has been so overwhelming much of the time with months of negative news, never ending data to process and confusing choices to make on complex issues while partisan experts are shouting every half-hour on news/talk stations that we are all doomed if their candidate doesn't win. Not to mention the huge challenge on is trust-worthy, since you often don't know who will say something inappropriate on YouTube.com and crash their credibility, leaving you feeling very alone to make some major decisions without leaders who lacked the strength of character to stand on their convictions instead of popular opinion polls.

Mountain top experiences guarantee the next step is always the valley

Think of a major campaign like climbing a major mountain range. You prepare for years and climb for months to finally reach the top. Once there the view is great. You take some pictures, but you can't stay on a mountain top, so no matter which way you head, it's down in any direction. After the mountain top comes the valley, which is a normal part of life. The danger is that for many people the downward slide is so unexpected. Most actual mountain climbing accidents happen on the way down, and I project that there will be millions of people who are unprepared for the emotional upheaval they are about to experience after the election is over.

Everyone will feel some degree of emotional let down once the issues have been decided and the acceptance speeches are given. That's normal, however for some the removal of posters, signs, balloons and banners will lead to a free fall of depressing emotions. If someone has been a 'news junkie' the last few months it will be especially stressful. Those feelings of distress will come out in one of two ways.

Two possible reactions to post-election distress

1) Anger –

Which can lead to violence and impulsive decisions. People who feel violated by the election process will often turn to dumping volcanic levels of anger at someone or something to find relief for the pressure inside. This can lead to devastating decisions, impulsive rage or using the wrong words in front of the wrong people and losing credibility or worse a job. This can happen in men or women, young or old, but is most commonly seen in more extroverted personalities and it tends to blow up and blow out fast.

2) Apathy -

This is a more dangerous reaction, since it can lead from distress to the early stages of depression. Stuffing emotions inside is like burying them alive and they just keep building up, yet instead of blowing up and out, they blow in. This leads a person to feel emotionally numb, and often can cause an individual to commit a series of very quiet, yet very harmful self-destructive acts. Eating for comfort, drinking to numb the pain, hooking up with the wrong partner to try and

forget about the election or just refusing to answer the phone, closing the mini-blinds and checking out on life like a hermit hiding in a dark cave.

The best choice after an election is **Acceptance**. It's over and now it's time to move on with whatever leaders and issues the majority of voters selected. You can't change the outcome of an election, but you can freak yourself out with fears about the future apocalypse predicted by many. Don't do that! Life will go on, and your world will continue. **What happens in your house is way more important than what happens in the White House** since you can't control what political leaders do, but you can control you. Let this journey off of the political 'mountain' be one of a growing sense of perspective as you remember that after the valley there will be another mountain to climb. There will be another day to vote on national issues and when the dust settles your life will usually be about as good as you choose to make it. This approach takes the power to control your mood away from the politicians or the media, so you can build a better life without losing sleep or energy from the dangers of post-election distress syndrome.

About the author- Dwight Bain is dedicated to helping people achieve greater results. He is a Nationally Certified Counselor, Certified Life Coach and Certified Family Law Mediator in practice since 1984 with a primary focus on solving crisis events and managing major change. He is a member of the National Speakers Association and partners with media, major corporations and non-profit organizations to make a positive difference in our culture. Access more counseling and coaching resources designed to save you time by solving stressful situations by visiting his counseling blog with over 150 complimentary articles and special reports at www.LifeWorksGroup.org or 407.647.7005 in Orlando.