

An Overwhelming Discovery: Part 1  
For Best Results Use Forty-Two and Ninety-Two Percent  
Tara Crooks | October 13, 2006

Have you been feeling overwhelmed lately? I have. I am sure you have noticed in your “Army wife life” that things can become a bit harried especially in this modern day when not only are we dealing with everyday military life but deployments are a major reality. Military spouses are as active as ever, taking on more than their fair share of responsibilities from becoming an instant “single mom” to subletting their schedule as a home for military activities. It’s not just military life that does it either, it’s the normal every day things like taking care of the children, feeding the dogs, mowing the lawn, cleaning the house, paying the bills...need I say more? Then there is the added factor if you are a spouse with a career or even one with a part time job. You’re out there trying to balance your life, your work, your family, your volunteer service, and everything else under the sun.

I am sure by this point you’ve realized I must have been writing the above from experience. That was me. That is me. I was overwhelmed. I recently attended a workshop called “Follow your dreams while you follow the military” held by authors Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer, both military spouses. In this workshop Kathie and Holly teach that 42% of your happiness is your attitude toward life. Improving your attitude is done by improving your thoughts and actions. Negativism is so much more powerful than positivism, so you have to genuinely work on becoming a more positive person. I quickly wrote down the 42% rule.

After this workshop I was having a discussion with my business partner Star Henderson, telling her how I would love to live this 42% rule right now but I was still finding myself overwhelmed with all that military life was throwing my way. I have always been a positive person but it’s so hard to put forth that effort all the time with so many things going on. Star threw a different percentage my way. She asked me “Tara, do you know that 92% is still an A?” Being the goal oriented person I was she knew this was exactly what I needed to hear.

I function most of my life in most everything at 110%. I didn’t know how to accept much less from myself. In Army life not expecting that much from others was also quite a frustration. That frustration led to overwhelming myself, since no one else could give me that 110% I decided I’d just do it all myself.

I found myself in one large pile of frustration and overwhelming feelings. Coupled with facing another deployment, those led me to becoming that which I could not stand; a negative person. I was in a downward spiral. I started asking myself questions. How could I mentor others to be positive if I felt so negative myself? How can I lead people through a life with which I am so frustrated? Who am I? I don't even feel like myself. Then it occurred to me that I was what I always said I was, just like each of you, a military spouse. This wasn't anything that each of you hadn't gone through once before yourself (if you aren't going through it now). The only people who can validate and understand

our feelings are those that have been there, and I was doing just that, learning how to teach you how I "was there" and survived. So I decided to pick myself up out of the spiral and inch my way back to a place where my head was above water. I reached out to others, learned from their experiences, and pocketed tidbits of information I was able to put into action.

Through these experiences and actions some things have evolved. I was able to clear off my plate by letting go of things that weren't things I *had* to do. I was able to look under a microscope at projects and realize what details could be left and which ones had to stay. I was able to ask myself the tough questions of what is really important to me. I aligned my schedule to become more in touch with my values and my dreams. I had to make some tough choices, letting go of some things that I had previously held on to. I had to learn to say "no." I had to also learn to realize that when others said "no" it wasn't always because they didn't want to, but because they had to. On the side of being a positive person, I try each day to realize how lucky I am that I am able to have so many choices from which to choose my favorite things to do. I am blessed to be able to be so involved, needed, and depended upon.

In the end, I have learned to live in the percentages. Is it work? You bet! Being the best you can be doesn't always mean that you have to function on high speed 110% of the time. Granted, I'll never be one to completely slow down. My standards are still considered high. I still have those moments when I wonder how I'll ever be able to pull myself into the 42% bracket and be positive about the situation. We're all going to have those moments, nothing is ever perfect, but like Star says, 92% is still an A!

### EDITED VERSION

Have you felt overwhelmed lately? I have. I am sure you have noticed in your "Army Wife Life" that things can become a bit harried especially when we deal with everyday military life and deployments.

Military spouses are as active as ever, and it's not just military life harries us. It's the normal every day things: taking care of the children, working a full- or part-time job, feeding the dogs, mowing the lawn, cleaning the house, paying the bills ... need I say more? You're out there trying to balance your life, your work, your family, your volunteer service, and everything else under the sun.

I am sure by this point you've realized I must have been writing the above from experience. That was me. That is me. I was overwhelmed. I recently attended a workshop called "Follow Your Dreams While You Follow the Military," held by authors Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer, both military spouses. In this workshop Kathie and Holly say that 42 percent of your happiness is your attitude toward life. Improving your attitude is done by improving your thoughts and actions. Negativity is so much more powerful than positivity, so you have to genuinely work on becoming a more positive person. I quickly wrote down the 42 percent rule.

After this workshop I was having a discussion with my business partner Star Henderson, telling her how I want to live this 42 percent rule right now but I still find myself overwhelmed with all that military life throws my way. I have always been a positive person but it's so hard to put forth that effort all the time. Star threw a different percentage my way. She asked me "Tara, do you know that 92 percent is still an A?" Being the goal oriented person I was she knew this was exactly what I needed to hear.

I give 110 percent in everything I do. I didn't know how to accept any less from myself. In Army life not expecting that much from others was also quite a frustration. That frustration led to overwhelming myself, since no one else could give me that 110 percent I decided I'd just do it all myself.

I found myself feeling frustrated and overwhelmed. Coupled with facing another deployment, those feelings led me to become a negative person. I was in a downward spiral. I started asking myself questions: How could I mentor others to be positive if I felt so negative myself? How can I lead people through a life with which I am so frustrated? Who am I? I don't even feel like myself. Then it occurred to me that I was what I always said I was, just like each of you, a military spouse. This isn't anything that a military spouse hasn't gone through before. The only people who can validate and understand our feelings are those that have been there. And I was doing just that, learning how to tell you "I was there" and survived. So I decided to pick myself up out of the negative spiral and inch my way back to a place where my head was above water. I reached out to others, learned from their experiences, and pocketed tidbits of information I was able to put into action.

Through these experiences and actions some things have evolved. I was able to clear off my plate by letting go of things that weren't things I had to do. I was able to look under a microscope at projects and realize what details could be left and which ones had to stay. I was able to ask myself the tough questions of what is really important to me. I aligned my schedule to become more in touch with my values and my dreams. I had to make some tough choices, letting go of some things that I had previously held on to. I had to learn to say "no." I had to also learn to realize that when others said "no" it wasn't always because they didn't want to, but because they had to. On the side of being a positive person, I try each day to realize how lucky I am that to be able to choose my favorite things to do. I am blessed to be able to be so involved, needed, and depended upon.

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Making the Percentages Work for You  
Tara Crooks | October 27, 2006

Reference: An Overwhelming Discovery: Part 1 (insert link)

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So how do you make these percentages work for you? There is a quote called the “Serenity Prayer” that says. “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.” No matter what your religion or beliefs, that is good advice. When faced with being overwhelmed, stressed, or frustrated you have two options; change it or cope with it. Below are some strategies for you to exercise those options.

1. Recognize what you are feeling. Do you feel powerless and out of control? Do you feel like you have too many things to do? You don’t know where to start? One of the biggest challenges that we have is recognizing this and figuring out how to cope instead of continuing down into a negative spiral, complicating the situation even more.
2. Get specific about what is overwhelming you. Write down a list about what it is that you are feeling is out of control. Is it a move, deployment, kids, household chores, work?
3. Develop coping strategies. Some of the things I list below can help, but realize you might have to take the time to research and ask for some help.
4. Discuss and talk about your feelings with others. Finding a friend that is a positive force can make all the difference. Tell them you need help and then vent, asking them for some suggestions for solutions. Be careful not to pull them down into your spiral with you. Go into the conversation letting them know you are looking for a resolution.

I have discovered some tips that will help you in this crazy life to be able to take some time for yourself and function with a better outlook and a whole lot less stress. Here are some simple suggestions that will help you craft a more positive environment.

1. Write down everything you have to do. Circle the things you do not want to do. Go back through and cross out those things you do not want to do that you do not *have* to do.
2. Schedule your time. This is half the battle; most live without a schedule and don't realize where their time is being spent.
3. Define your values. What is most important to you? Family? Friends? Volunteering? Work? From what do you receive the most personal reward? What makes you happy?
4. Using your schedule, highlight those things that are in line with your values. Cross out those things that are not in line with your values.
5. Start a grateful journal. Each night write in a journal things for which you are grateful for that day. This is great for children as well.
6. Take time to play a game, sit outdoors, and spend time with friends. Schedule that time if you have to but make it happen.
7. Turn off your phone. Conveniently misplace your cell phone, turn off the ringer on your home phone. Take a day with no "rings", it's ok to do once and awhile. This works well with all electronics!
8. Make someone else's day. Ironically, making others happy can in turn really improve your outlook. Spend one day making an effort to say nothing but fun, inspiring, positive things to others and see what happens to your day.
9. Take a break. If you are at work don't feel guilty for taking a short "me" break. Have lunch and read the paper. Go out with your co-workers to a nice restaurant.
10. Get a massage or treat yourself to a pedicure or manicure. Amazingly this is just the right medicine when you are stressed.
11. Exercise. This doesn't mean you have to start a new exercise regimen, for some that can be stressful enough by itself. It means you can take a walk, or go for a swim.
12. Laugh. This is the best medicine. When in doubt, pop in a funny movie, or a watch good stand-up comedian. At my house, we take a minute to play with our dogs and laugh at the funny things they do.

Remember, these aren't things you'll remember to do unless you constantly strive and put forth a genuine effort to do them. It's all too easy to forget and end up right back where you started. Post little reminders to yourself somewhere you'll see them. Take a moment out of each day and your hardest to live by 42% and 92% and you'll be a more positive, more relaxed, and more effective person.