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INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

This 2-page Insert contains the passages for comprehension. Please detach it and fill in your particulars in the boxes above. You will have to submit this Insert separately at the end of the examination.

Passage 1: Getty Eden believes that learning to cope brings benefits

- 1 Travel three hours east of Los Angeles, California and one will chance upon some of the world's oldest living things. Limbs frozen in dance-like poses, spiky Joshua trees stand their ground with panache in the Mojave Desert. Not mere attention-seekers, their leaves can be used in craftwork, their buds, fruit and seeds eaten, and their canopy a refuge for desert creatures. We do not have to be experts in charismatic megafauna to admire their grotesque beauty and hardiness. The epitome of survival and ability borne of perseverance, we should keep the lessons offered by the Joshua trees close to our hearts. In good times, a can-do spirit is the wind beneath our sails that propels us forward. In bad times, such as a national emergency or personal crisis, the ability to cope helps us stay afloat and lend a hand to others floundering in similar predicaments. 10
- 2 The twenty-first century has been punctuated by inclement weather, technological glitches, and untold divisiveness and we can minimise their impact by learning to cope with them. Even when the outcomes of our efforts are imperfect, we will feel energised and the satisfaction from dealing with trying circumstances enables us to enjoy better emotional health than someone who has led an uneventful life. Post-traumatic stress disorder tests conducted with survivors of aeroplane crashes and shipwrecks revealed that they were not only less irritable, but had a positive outlook. In contrast, the individuals who formed the control group were more bad-tempered and likely to vent their anger when things go awry. Our scoutmasters and counsellors are right after all: adversity helps build character. By learning to cope, we acquire the confidence to face the next challenge and worry less. Thus braced for crisis management, we do not upset the people around us with our whinging about impending doom but win approbation for being willing to 'just do it'. 15 20
- 3 That said, coping is not always intuitive or easy. Individuals facing uncertainty will have to first courageously admit that they do not have the answers, but doing so makes it possible for them to take the next step of seeking help from experts or joining peer support groups to learn to alleviate their troubles. Opening up to someone may already be therapeutic, while listening to counsel or other people's woes reminds them to reframe their negative thoughts. Not only will these realisations cocoon them against new anxieties, they activate the production of dopamine, the primary reward chemical. Individuals who learn to cope may find their physical condition improving too if they seek to strengthen their psychological immunity by recharging themselves with a good diet, regular exercise and sleep. Thus attuned to the transformative power of coping, and empathising with others who are as despondent as they used to be, they might use their coping mechanisms to spread good cheer. It can be as simple as giving friends a call to check on their wellbeing or sending them a care package. Extraverted individuals might even use their talents to bring succour to complete strangers. 25 30 35
- 4 American composer Irving Berlin is said to have written "Count Your Blessings" while managing stress-induced insomnia. Indeed, gratitude is a wholesome way to build resilience, but like any other coping strategy, reframing our thoughts requires practice and may seem peculiar at first. Nevertheless, we must not be cynical or let our resolve ebb away. In an era beset by change and uncertainty, learning to cope is the best way forward. 40

Passage 2: Julie Beck argues that we need to do more than learning to cope

- 1 In one instalment of the Marvel movie franchise, when Captain America awakens from frozen slumber in the twenty-first century and realises he cannot return to his past, our superhero resigns himself to his fate in an unfamiliar world with his trademark composure. “It’s tempting to want to live in the past. It’s comfortable but it’s also where fossils come from,” he declares before he proceeds to assist the Avengers in saving mankind. Such can be, at least in fiction, the legendary power of coping. 5
- 2 For mortals without the Captain’s super-soldier stoicism however, they have to grapple with adversity by muddling along. Despite living in an increasingly off-kilter world, learning to cope remains the recommended remedy to blunt fears and reduce misery. Lest you think this is new-fangled advice, the British government issued posters with reassuring messages like ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ to boost morale and mentally prepare its civilians for attacks during World War II. Today, to deflect criticism of their inept efforts when addressing problems, global leaders dish out dubious suggestions for coping. Cope with racist tragedies by reposting recordings of the episode! Cope with a country-wide lockdown by bursting into morale-boosting song in a neighbourhood flash mob! 10 15
- 3 This encouragement of merely coping when calamity hits may have been taken too far. Instead of looking for viable solutions, we are persuaded to put our faith in empathetic inaction. While Sub-Saharan farmers affected by persistent drought bemoan the dried soil blown away from their farms, the rest of the world deals with the environmental emergency by counting down together before taking one iconic action – switching off the lights. The public then proceeds to watch approvingly as pubescent youngsters go on strike for their future. Millions applaud by the sidelines instead of pressurising governments to adopt sustainable nature-based solutions or living carbon neutral lifestyles themselves. Such coping strategies may reduce the stress of the moment but encourage a habitual avoidance of issues. 20
- 4 Indeed, indulging in coping is crippling in the long run. Studies into why companies fail often pin the blame on leaders who do not rouse themselves to tackle new threats. A textbook example is the Kodak and Fujifilm duel for dominance in the imaging industry at the turn of the century. Unlike Kodak which was constrained by its culture of legacy practices, Fujifilm outperformed Kodak by diversifying bravely into unexpected markets like cosmetics and medicine. Unsurprisingly, the famous ‘Kodak moment’ has passed. Furthermore, the increasing reliance on connectivity to data, people and experiences requires a fundamental shift in how individuals and businesses stay relevant. When an adversary can be born from a hackathon, unrelenting rivalry rather than simply surviving is the new normal. A company’s arsenal for success should include participating in Twitter skirmishes and recruiting digital influencers who fight for online visibility. 30 35
- 5 The weapons for winning may differ, but the competitive imperative does not. If even Captain America needs his star-spangled vibranium shield to deflect kinetic threats and the support of the assembled Avengers to save mankind in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, mere coping cannot be mankind’s response to a capricious world.