



Coping with pressure



When I became Prime Minister of Finland this summer, I was reminded of rock star Billy Joel's 1982 hit song "Pressure." The lyrics are about the importance of pacing yourself and remembering that you're just like everyone else, even when you have to perform under extreme duress.

My first months as PM have not been that bad, but my new job has certainly redefined the notion of pressure for me. Sure, I had been a government minister and a member of the European Parliament for the better part of ten years, but the stuff that comes flying at you when you're the PM is something else.

NOT TAKING EVERYTHING PERSONALLY IS AN INVALUABLE ASSET.

A constant flow of decisions – big and small – must be made. Sometimes I feel as though I'm involved in constant crisis management, with one issue following another.

There's the big stuff: Ukraine, the budget, the economy, security policy, health care and municipal reform. As I write this column one of our coalition partners is about to leave the government because of nuclear power issues.

Then there's the medium stuff, everything from legislation to administration. Pushing a piece of law through parliament is often easier said than done, especially if

you have a narrow majority. Administering a government, a political party and a ministry is no easy feat.

Then there's the smaller stuff. I might say or do something silly that creates mayhem in the media or elsewhere. A member of my party or government might get into trouble for one reason or another. No matter where I go, a microphone may suddenly be thrust in front of me – and I must be ready to comment.

The truth is that all problems, regardless of size, need to be solved. Sometimes they are complicated, frustrating and time-consuming. Most of the time they all get solved – if not today, then tomorrow.

We all feel pressure at times, whether it's at work or home. The best way to deal with it is by staying calm, cool and collected. The more pressure you feel, the more important this is. Not taking everything personally is also an invaluable asset.

At the same time it's key to show empathy, as many problems may have personal ramifications for a lot of people. In these situations it's fine to stay cool, but being cold sends out entirely the wrong message.

Being PM might sound grand, but to be blatantly honest, it is like any other job that requires the human touch. You have to make decisions and solve problems. Yes, there are lots of them, and, yes, they often have far-reaching consequences.

Billy Joel is right. We have to pace ourselves. And we have to learn how to deal with pressure, one step at a time.

Now where is my next problem to be solved? ●

ALEXANDER STUBB is the Prime Minister of Finland. He wrote this column on deadline, but didn't get too stressed about it.
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