

SPECIFIC STEPS: Dealing With Uncertainty, Crisis, and Change



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When we go through a crisis, our stress levels increase significantly. Whether it is a natural disaster, an accident, a global pandemic, or a workplace change, dealing with a crisis can take its toll.

More and more, leaders and managers have to help their teams cope with the stress surrounding a crisis, challenge, or change. Workplaces have to equip their people with tools they can use to deal with stressful situations. Many workplaces are expanding their medical benefits to include more mental health resources. If you or your teams are struggling to cope in a crisis, here are some techniques that may help.

Note: This is not a substitute for mental health counseling. People with elevated levels of anxiety or depression are encouraged to seek professional help.

Step One: Acknowledge the Situation for What it is

When you are dealing with a crisis or demanding situation, it is easy to let emotions take over. The emotional component can cause you to view the demanding situation differently. It is common to perceive situations as worse than they actually are. This is known as catastrophizing, and it can greatly reduce your ability to deal with difficult situations. How can you acknowledge the situation for what it is?

Do not Ignore the Situation

While it may be tempting to bury your head in the sand, ignoring the situation is not going to make it go away. It could be that you are in a lot of debt which has started to spiral out of control. Instead of addressing the issue, ignoring it tends to be the easiest option. Unfortunately, ignoring problems tends to make it worse.

A crisis is not going to go away by pretending it is not happening. If anything, it will likely continue to get worse until you do finally address it. So, if you have been ignoring the situation, now is the time to stop and confront it.

Avoid Making Excuses

You will often find that you stay stuck in a crisis or demanding situation because you continue to make excuses. You may not recognize that this is what you are doing in the moment. For example, you may not feel like you are making excuses because to you, the excuses are genuine barriers you are facing.

There is a difference between an excuse and a reason. A reason is a legitimate barrier.

An excuse is rationalizing why you do not want to take a particular action. To differentiate the two, make a list of everything that looks like a reason why you cannot move forward, or why you are struggling to mentally work through the situation and figure out the next step.

Write an R next to the legitimate obstacles, and an E next to what is just you making excuses because it is inconvenient, or you do not want to do something.

Then, look at ways to overcome the barriers you have acknowledged. There are always ways around things and strategies you can use to overcome the reasons you are currently stuck. When you commit to making a change and avoid making excuses, you will find it much easier to deal with the crisis.

Let us say you have a friend with a serious medical condition. You would like to be more supportive during their hospital stay, *but...you have this list of why you are not helping.*

The hospital is an hour away.

You do not like hospitals - they make you anxious.

Your car broke down and you cannot drive to the hospital.

The hospital requires all visitors to wear masks.

You are not sure what you would say while visiting.

You are scheduled to be out of town for work throughout the duration of their hospital stay.

Now, honestly assess the challenge and note an R (reason) or an E (excuse) next to each obstacle, and what you can do to overcome it. Are these actual reasons why you cannot be supportive, or are they just excuses because you would rather do other things?

The hospital is an hour away. E – you can get there.

You do not like hospitals - they make you anxious. E – go and practice deep breathing. Focus on being helpful for your friend.

Your car broke down and you cannot drive to the hospital. R- maybe you can borrow a car or take an Uber or Lyft, or get your car fixed right away. This R is probably temporary.

The hospital requires all visitors to wear masks. E – no one likes masks.

You are not sure what you would say while visiting. E – you are there to provide support to your friend. It is not about you.

You are scheduled to be out of town for work throughout the duration of their hospital stay. R – what can you do when they get out of the hospital to provide support?

Gain Control Over Your Emotions

If there is one thing that is going to stop you from moving forward, it is not having control over your emotions. The emotions we feel can be extremely powerful; particularly the negative emotions we feel. Therefore, if you are dealing with fear or anger, you are going to find it more difficult to handle a situation effectively.

To gain more control over your emotions, you are going to need to analyze them. What is driving the fear or anxiety? You can also start practicing mindfulness, such as meditation and deep breathing exercises. These will help you to calm the mind and learn how to interrupt and disrupt negative emotions.

Staying calm and focused during times of stress, challenge, and change

People who have not spent much time on boats or ships are often surprised to learn that the boat's anchor does not hold it in place. The anchor is not tied to the bottom of the ocean. The anchor is dropped and positioned, and the weight of the chain is what keeps the boat from drifting away.

Boat anchors are checked and repositioned when the tides, winds, and drifting causes the boat to move. Sometimes the anchor gets snagged on coral or debris, and when trying to pull up the anchor, it can get stuck. The boat has to be repositioned to release the anchor from the unseen hazard. What is normally a tool of stability and a valuable part of the ship becomes challenging, so the anchor gets repositioned.

Sometimes we need to evaluate our sense of stability and reposition where we are, like a boat repositioning its anchor.

Practicing repositioning allows us to decrease stress, increase focus, and ignore irritations.

Here are some ways to stay grounded and focused, regardless of the situation.

1. Breathe!

During times of stress or irritation, it is natural to take breathes that are shallow. To anchor in the moment, pay attention to your breathing. Make a conscious effort to

breathe in slowly and deeply, following the path of your breath with your mind. Feel the air move through your body. Then breathe out slowly and gently, again paying attention to the movement of your body as air passes through it. Concentrate on feeling a subtle energy shift of calm.

2. Check in with your five senses

If you are finding it a little tricky to access your inner peace or you are distracted, try the 5 senses check-in. Make a conscious decision to disconnect from distractions and focus your awareness, one sense at a time, on what you can see, feel, hear, smell and taste in that moment. This grounds you in the present moment by becoming more aware of what is impacting your space. This can be especially helpful when you feel stressed or harried.

3. Mind like water

Take every opportunity that comes your way to practice being calm, especially during a crisis, when others are feeling frantic. Being calm puts us in the space where we control our mental and physical reactions during challenges moments. Some people find it helpful to picture the surface of a calm body of water and think, "*mind like water.*" Great times to practice this are where you might feel frustrated and impatient, like waiting in line or while you are stuck in traffic. Put a half-smile on your face and remind yourself that you are calm.

4. Use repositioning techniques to create thinking space

No matter how busy you are, you can use repositioning techniques to build more space into your day. Before you send an email, take time to breathe, notice your breath, then decide if you want to send the email.

Choose to ignore or switch off your devices. Schedule 5-minute breaks to reposition between activities or projects. Practice being present around other people. Give other people your full attention and respect, and you will have a more meaningful and productive conversation.

Put the Situation into Perspective

Another thing that is going to help is putting the situation into perspective. When terrible things happen, catastrophizing is a common response. In the moment, everything tends to be an extremely negative reaction because emotions are high and we tend to focus on the worst instead of what is good and positive about the situation.

Catastrophizing tends to occur when the mind becomes overwhelmed by a situation.

So, writing down the crisis you are going through, and your perspectives can help you to properly analyze them. Could the situation be viewed differently? Are you being influenced by things that have happened in the past? If so, look at ways you can potentially view the situation from a more positive angle.

Keep Your Thoughts Realistic

To acknowledge a crisis or demanding situation, you are going to need to keep your thoughts balanced and honest. That is, avoiding negative thoughts from taking over. We all have an inner critic and if left unchecked, it will affect our ability to deal with tough situations in a healthy manner. Like controlling your emotions, you also need to focus on controlling your thoughts. When you can recognize and counteract negative thinking, it can really help you to gain more control over how you respond.

You may find it useful to keep a thought tracker journal. Whenever you experience a negative thought, write it down and note what you were doing at the time. This will help you to start getting a better idea of the things that trigger your negative thinking. The more you can recognize your negative thoughts, the easier you will find it to change them.

These are some of the best ways to acknowledge the crisis or demanding situation that you are in. Once you have a good understanding of the situation, you can then move on to the next step – creating a plan to deal with it.

Step Two: Develop a Plan for How to Deal with the Challenge

The number one thing that is going to help you to deal with a crisis or demanding situation, is a plan. Once you have a good understanding of the situation, you can develop a plan to help you overcome it.

How can you develop a crisis plan and what type of things should you include?

Brainstorm Solutions and Analyze the Pros and Cons

To create an effective crisis plan, you are going to want to brainstorm practical solutions. Now that you can clearly see what the barriers are, it gives you the opportunity to look for ways to overcome them.

Write down all the potential solutions you can think of. For example, if you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, you would work with the doctor to determine a

treatment plan. However, you would also research more about the condition, as well as look at lifestyle changes you can make.

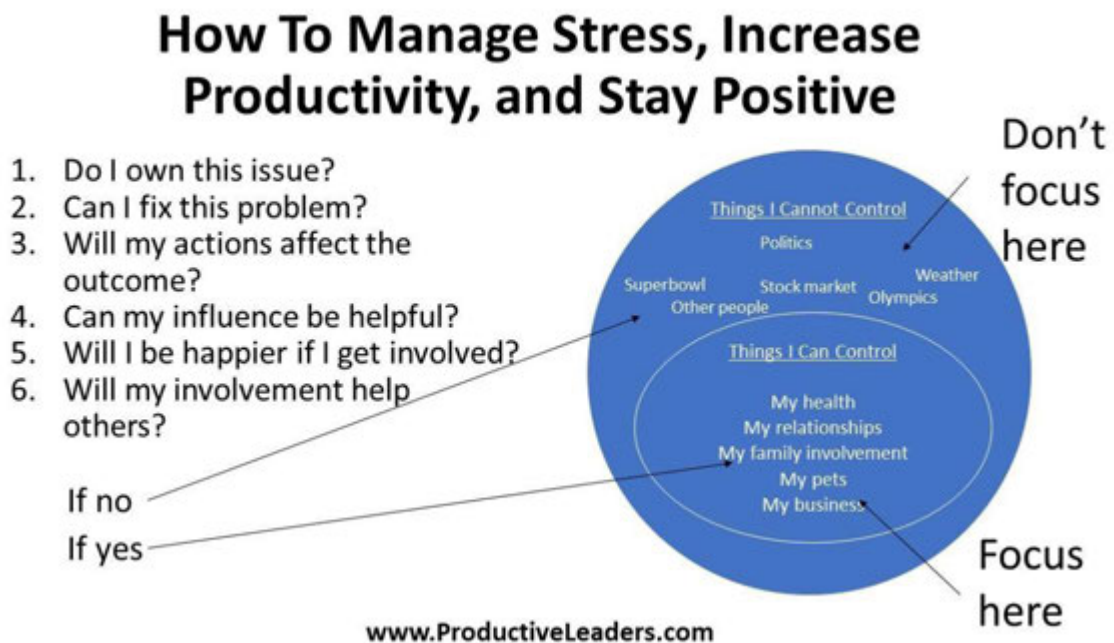
Similarly, if you are going through a leadership change, write down the steps you need to navigate the new workplace dynamic.

If you find your debt levels are too high, you can seek help from a debt counsellor, contact creditors, and use the snowball method to tackle them.

When you identify potential solutions, look at the pros and cons of each possibility. The key is to find viable options and base the plan on the best course of action, which is often not the easiest path.

Map Out the Things You Can Control

In any demanding situation, there are things that you can and cannot change. Start by making a list of the things that you can change, such as attitude and reactions. When you list the things you can control, you will regain more power over the situation.



List the Things You Cannot Control

Once you have your list of the things you can control, write another of the things you cannot. This will show you what you should and should not focus on. The trouble is,

when you focus on the things you cannot control, it is going to leave you frustrated and stressed. You will also likely give up trying to change the situation if you feel powerless by the things you cannot change.

Be honest about the parts of the situation you have no control over. Then, focus your efforts on the things you can control. These are some of the best ways to create a plan for dealing with a crisis or demanding situation.

Step Three: Seek Help When Needed

Part of overcoming a demanding situation or crisis is knowing when to seek help. We all need help occasionally, whether it is with our mental health, a leadership coach, a corporate advisor, or to help us understand the situation from an unbiased viewpoint.

Reaching out for help is not always easy, but it can make a dramatic difference to how quickly you overcome a situation. The question is, how do you know when you need to seek professional help to get through tough times?

Top Signs That it is Time to Seek Help

You may not always recognize when it is time to seek professional help with a situation. Many people prefer to try and deal with things themselves and feel like they should not need any help to get through the crisis. However, not seeking help can cause you to stay in a negative situation for longer and making the situation worse.

If you want to know when it is time to seek help, look out for the following signs:

- You are finding it hard to cope with daily decisions
- You feel sad, anxious, or nervous most of the time
- You cannot get over past mistakes
- You are self-medicating
- Nothing you have tried is helping

Most people feel sad and anxious during challenging times. However, if it is impacting your daily life and you feel like this often, it could be time to seek help. When you are struggling to cope, it is going to be extremely difficult to identify the steps you need to take to get out of a tough situation. You also will not have the motivation or willpower needed to make changes.

You may also find it difficult overcoming past mistakes. The unresolved feelings could be negatively impacting your current situation. Past trauma can cause you to react in unhealthy ways when faced with future difficulties. Therefore, overcoming an unresolved

past is key to moving forward and dealing with the tough situation's life throws at you along the way. A licensed therapist will be able to help you address and overcome past trauma.

Do you self-medicate when faced with tough times? It could be that you turn to alcohol or drugs to help numb the pain. You may comfort eat to help you deal with trauma. Selfmedicating provides temporary relief, but it is also highly dangerous. Using substances, can make tough situations worse. If you find that you self-medicate, getting help can help you to gain better control over the situation.

Finally, another sign you may need to seek help is if you have tried to overcome the situation, but nothing has worked. We cannot always solve everything by ourselves. So, do not be afraid to admit when nothing you do is working. A qualified business coach, corporate advisor, or therapist can help you to identify new methods of dealing with a crisis. They can also help you to determine why the things you have tried have not worked.

Step Four: Change the Things You Can, and Let Go of the Things You Cannot

Positive change in life generally comes when we focus on the things we can change. This means, we need to let go of the things that we cannot change. Unfortunately, this is often easier said than done. Here, we will look at how you can identify the things you can change and let go of the things you cannot.

What Can You Control?

In any demanding situation, there are always things you can control. The main things you can control are:

- How you react to the situation
- How you feel
- The way that you spend your time
- Your lifestyle choices
- The commitments you keep
- Whether you seek help or not

You may feel like you have no control over how you feel or react. However, there are lots of techniques you can use to develop better control over your reactions and emotions. You always get to control how you feel, and you can always choose to be grateful and happy. The key is figuring out how through learning different techniques.

You also get to choose how you spend your time. Everybody gets the same 24 hours in their day. How you use these hours will determine well you deal with a situation. The more time you spend trying to work on the issues you face, the quicker you will get out of the tough situation you are in.

The lifestyle choices you make will also impact how well you deal with a situation. We already discussed earlier how substance abuse can contribute towards making a tough situation worse. Look at your lifestyle choices and see whether they could be impacting the situation. If they are, focus on changing your habits to give you better control over the circumstances you experience due to the crisis. These are just some of the things you can control in a situation. By acknowledging the things, you can change, you can then start to work on them.

How To Let Go of Things You Cannot Change

As well as working towards the things you can change, it is also equally important to let go of the things you cannot. However, this can be really challenging for some people.

If you are looking to let go of the things you cannot change in your current situation, the following things may help:

- Journaling
- Mindfulness
- Affirmations
- Professional coaching or therapy

Journaling has shown to have lots of great benefits, including helping you to let go of the things you cannot change. Write down the things you cannot change. Look at what you wrote and see if there are any emotions or behaviors you can identify that are stopping you from moving forward. Journaling is a wonderful way to help you understand demanding situations and what is holding you back from overcoming them.

You can also try mindfulness to help you let go of things you cannot change. The various mindfulness techniques are designed to clear the mind and slow down the breathing. They help you to focus on the now, rather than worrying about the future or obsessing over your past. As you develop a calmer, more balanced mindset, you will start to find it much easier to let things go that you do not have any control over.

Many people find that affirmations can also help them to let go. There are hundreds of positive affirmations out there. Studies show that these affirmations can help to boost motivation, improve the mindset, and give you a better sense of control over a situation. Look up affirmations relating to letting go and you will find a lot of different ones you can repeat to yourself each day.

Finally, remember to seek help when it is needed. You will not always be able to let things go by yourself. So, recognizing when you need help to do so is important.

Look For the Good in Every Situation

If you listen to people who have overcome demanding situations, they often have a positive outlook. That is, they see the good in a tough situation. It is not always easy to identify good things in a crisis; particularly if the situation is extremely challenging. However, no matter how bad a situation is, there is usually at least one positive thing you can take away. Now let us look at how you can identify the good in a situation.

Develop a Positive Mindset

How you think will ultimately impact how you see a situation. For example, if you are depressed and anxious, your outlook will be pessimistic. If you are happy and enthusiastic, you will automatically look at things in a more positive manner.

Therefore, if you want to start looking at the good things in a tough situation, you are going to need to develop a more positive mindset. There are lots of ways you can do this. You could start your day with a positive intention or focus on turning negative thoughts into positive ones.

You will find so many tips and techniques you can use online to develop a more positive mindset. There are also therapists who specialize in positive mindset techniques.

Identify Potential Lessons

Sometimes, the positive in a crisis or demanding situation, is that it teaches you something. What lessons could you learn from what is happening right now?

Challenging times always teach us a lesson. Going through challenging times is what shapes us and helps us to become better people. If you can identify the lesson in your time of crisis, it is going to help you to grow as a person. This also means that if you are faced with the same situation again, you will be in a much better position to overcome it.

Laugh

In challenging times, you are not going to want to laugh very often. However, laughter helps to relieve physical and mental tension. If you can find something to laugh at

throughout your day, you are going to notice your stress levels reduce. This in turn will make you feel much stronger and better able to overcome tough times.

Practice Gratitude

Perhaps the most effective way to help you to look for the good in a situation, is to practice gratitude. Studies have shown that writing down 3-5 things that you are grateful for each day, helps to make you happier and more positive. [Download your PDF Here.](#)

As you make writing down the things you are grateful for a daily habit, it gradually rewires the brain. After a brief period of time, you will notice you automatically start to find more positives throughout the day.

Step Five: Accept the New Reality

The ultimate step to dealing with a crisis or demanding situation, is accepting that you may not be 100% happy with the outcome. Sometimes, we must simply accept a demanding situation for what it is. There will not always be a positive outcome from the things we go through in life.

The important thing is to learn any lessons the crisis may have taught. There are also things you can do to ensure you better accept a poor outcome. Developing coping skills to manage your feelings is an important thing on which you can focus. If you can handle the negative emotions caused by a situation, they won't be able to impact you or your future progress.

You also need to remember that you are defined by more than just this one situation. Everyone suffers setbacks and challenging times. Life is not easy. Just because this demanding situation did not work out how you wanted does not mean you will not get to enjoy future success.

If it has not worked out how you would have hoped, take a little time out for yourself. Stepping back from the situation and taking time to recover emotionally can really help. Part of the reason people end up having to deal with trauma from their past, is because they did not take the time to recover and heal after it happened. By taking time out now to deal with and accept the crisis, you will save yourself a lot of future pain and troubles.

Overall, dealing with a crisis or demanding situation is not easy. However, these steps can help you to cope better with the challenges that come your way. No matter what type of crisis you are dealing with, remember that aspects of it will eventually pass.

No challenging times last forever. With practice, you can improve your ability to cope much better during challenging times and reach out for help when you need it.

Need more help accomplishing this [Click here](#).