

If it looks like a dog ...

The value of acceptance in a resilient mindset

DENNIS J. HOIBERG*

The season just hasn't produced the results that you wanted it to? Despite all your good efforts you just haven't been able to achieve your objectives? You just wish you could have achieved a slightly different outcome? If only...

If only I had charged a fee every time I have heard this from a client!

People share their dreams, hopes and aspirations with me. I see people putting in an enormous effort to achieve all sorts of things. And I see the distress, disappointment and, worse, the frustration when they don't manage to achieve those objectives; typically because of things outside their control. Then I see the dysfunctional behaviour they display as a reaction to those emotions.

Acceptance is a basic skill in remaining resilient. This includes accepting yourself, your family, circles of acquaintances and the situation. As the saying goes, if it looks like a dog, scratches like a dog and barks like a dog, it isn't a cat; it's a dog. It is what it is and we have to deal with it.

Resilient people display problem-solving behaviour and focus on the situation – their reality. Displaying flight or fight (or freeze) behaviour will not contribute to resilience.

Flight behaviour is avoidance; denying there is a problem, not addressing issues, 'sticking their head in the sand', even lying to others and themselves about the situation. Fight behaviour is still avoidance but more aggressive, in the hope there will not be any 'push back' around the situation, though there inevitably is.

Flight or fight behaviour creates a negative behavioural cycle leading to the issue becoming more and more significant than it perhaps would have been if addressed immediately.

My advice is to accept the situation you find yourself in, then develop strategies to deal with this situation.

A long-term client of mine based in central NSW has a great attitude to problem solving. Even in the midst of real stress and thinking about how we should handle difficult business issues involving staff, clients, cash flow and debt management, his sage advice is to 'step back, don't do anything today, sleep on it overnight and if it's still an issue in the morning, let's do something about it then'.

While this seems like a denial strategy, I am amazed at the number of times, in my 15 years of working with him, big issues have become small issues over a very short period on time. What I have learnt from him over the journey is to keep things in perspective. Don't panic!

Another strategy is to step back from the enormity of an issue. Sometimes, in the middle of dark and challenging times, things can overwhelm us. The issues look enormous and we are not quite sure where to start. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time! Can you break the challenge down into little bits? If you can, where can you get 'bang for your buck'? In other words, where can you best focus your energy to make some progress towards resolving the situation? Sometimes it's worth thinking about the issue before

doing but it is also important to do, because the thinking process is sometimes the more challenging part.

Related to this strategy, what elements or issues are within your control and what can't you control? Focus on what you can control; not on what you can't.

I have witnessed people focusing their energies and worrying about things outside their control – the weather, the Australian dollar and so on. This is negative, and if this is our focus we start to believe there is nothing we can influence, which is typically wrong. Identify an element you can influence and control and do that. Doing something achievable and the success from it is sometimes enough to give you the momentum to address more difficult issues.

Part of this strategy is challenging yourself about things you think you can't control. Challenge yourself! Is it really true that you can't control some things? What do you think is out of your control? Why? What evidence is there of this inability? If you were to reframe how you see the issue and approach it in another way, would you see things differently? Can you apply some decision-making tools to assist? Edward De Bono's 'hats of thinking' model is very useful in situations such as this.

Develop a plan. Many people I work with are good at planning their business. When I ask to see their plan about how they are going to address the season or how they intend to run the enterprise they are able to impress me with their thinking and, if not with written plans, certainly the ones they carry in their heads.



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These people have good decision-making skills and are very logical and structured in their thinking – except when it comes to emotional issues involving themselves and people they care about. Use your skills in logical thinking and deduction to address some of the challenging issues in your lives. Think about an issue, break it down and prepare a plan to address it. Write the plan down. This enables you to share it and means it is there to use as a guide and anchor to come back to if things don't happen the way we want them too.

Things not working out doesn't mean the plan was wrong. Aspects of the issue may have changed or maybe the plan wasn't well executed. The other thing about a plan is that it can point towards options to handle similar situations if they arise in the future. You have to have a plan B.

If this strategy is to work for you, talk to people who can provide advice about components, content and options. There is also a little bit of our mother's advice that 'a problem shared is a problem moving towards resolution', in this!

What is the worst thing that could happen as a result of this situation? The worst-case scenario often jumps into our heads (and souls!) about three o'clock in the morning. All the negative self-talk and doubt runs unchecked in our heads and we go to the worst possible scenario. Stop! Think! What's the likelihood of this worst-case scenario occurring? What is a more likely scenario? What is the worst thing that can happen? How would you handle it?

I was discussing issues with a client who, for reasons within and outside his control, ended up accepting bankruptcy as a solution. He had become stuck on negative consequences and I asked the question: "So, what's the worst thing that will happen?" His response was "I will feel embarrassed and feel that I have failed." My next question was "What's the upside of this strategy?" His answer? "I'll be able to rebuild and pay back debts and that will make me feel great about myself."

At the end of the day there is always a downside to any tough decision or course of action but there is often also an upside with many, many positives. Focus on them and talk them up.

My final strategy around acceptance is to ask "Whose problem is this anyway?"

I have worked with people who carry the burden of challenges that aren't theirs to carry. While I admire the humanity of people who help others through bad (and good) times, we can't own other people's

problems. You can't rescue people. People are adults and need to be treated as adults. What's that saying? "You make your bed ..."

Think about it. Is this my problem? I believe we have an obligation to assist our fellow human beings but the key word is assist; not take over and own other people's challenges or issues. You have enough issues of your own without putting your hand up for other people's! Help, yes. Assist and be there, yes. But don't own.

I also have a strong belief, reinforced by watching the people I have worked with

over my years, that what will be, will be. I don't think we can be judged or judge ourselves on what we achieve. We can only be judged on what we do.

Focus on what you can do in the situation you are facing and accept that through focusing your energies on these aspects you can deal with whatever you are facing.

Stay resilient, look after yourself and make 2013 the best year ever.

* *Dennis Hoiberg is a change management practitioner with Lessons Learnt Consulting - www.lessonslearntconsulting.com*

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