

A quarterly publication service
produced by
LIVE Consultants Inc.

October 1998
Number 90

**MANAGEMENT
PERSPECTIVES**

Self-Management

From the Editor

Anybody who knows me understands that I like order, harmony, and logical progression. And there are some days when I get what I like. But there are other days when, for whatever reason, disorder, cacophony, and disorder occur. If the truth be known, however, those are the days when I am joyously jolted into re-assessing what I know.

I just had one of those days. A colleague playfully asked, "Which is true: a chain is only as strong as its weakest link or the strong make the weak stronger?" I obviously registered some confusion as I tried to sort out the truth and then, as if he were Columbo, he stroked his chin and observed, "I know the early bird gets the worm; however, the second mouse gets the cheese." He turned, shrugged, and left.

Intended or not, I was both amused and bemused. We seem to readily accept an aphorism or simple metaphor as a truth and often don't take the time to test its opposite or even the assumption that undergirds it.

At LIVE Consultants we help individuals, teams, and organizations test what they know, what they think they know, and what they don't know, recognizing that only then can reality be found.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

Imagine how wealthy you would be if you had a dollar for every time you heard something like, "Two steps forward and one step back," "Just when everything was going along perfectly, the wheels fell off and we were back to the starting line," or "I can't get ahead for falling behind."

Setbacks. They are part of our personal lives and our business lives; sometimes we create them for ourselves and sometimes we are in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In his article, Stephen Baetz offers five suggestions for what to do when faced with a nasty setback.

Stephen is a partner in LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization sponsoring this publication.



Stephen Baetz

Get On With Getting On

They come in all dimensions now. Large, medium, and small. The large are super-sized and almost overwhelming; although they try to be more intimate by serving cappuccinos and biscotti. Mediums have a bit of everything and often not enough. The smalls are cozy, warm, and really focused — they have to be to survive.

They all have one thing in common: a self-help section. It is, I am told, one of the busiest parts of a bookstore. In those aisles, we can find ample reassurances that we are not alone, step-by-step instructions for re-constructive emotional surgery, pleasant platitudes, and do-it-yourself psychotherapy by authors who are survivors of an emotional terror. A colleague of mine is waiting for the day when some enterprising author writes a book which outlines a 12-step program for those who are addicted to 12-step programs.

So why the popularity of the self-help section? Cynics might argue that we have become victims of a television mindset which infers that the most complex problems of the world can be solved in 60 minutes with five commercial breaks for the good life. Perhaps that is true for some. Others feel that the section is the urban replacement for elders who no longer live with us day-to-day. My hunch, however, is that individuals are buffeted by massive changes with enormous complexity and are working diligently at figuring out how to get themselves back on track, stable, secure — yes, back to some fundamentals that work. They're thinking about how to manage setbacks. And if that is the case, the pursuit is to be applauded. To that end, I would even like to add a few suggestions — it might even help eliminate a trip or two to the bookstore.

These suggestions come with two cautions. First, life is complex and no single set of suggestions can reflect that complexity. Second, suggestions, no matter how gently they are offered, are never as easy to implement as they are to talk about.

So with those cautions offered, allow me to add some ideas, suggestions, and approaches that you might use to manage setbacks.

Suggestion #1: Know what you own.

For sure, there are times when we either build our own barriers to success or sabotage our own good intentions and thereby create our own setbacks.

There are other occasions when people, circumstances, or events have conspired to produce negative or nasty outcomes. We were sitting in the wrong chair when fate dealt the hand.

Figure out what you own. Ask yourself, "What did I do — or didn't I do — to contribute to this outcome?" If you come to the conclusion that you did contribute, step up to the mark and come clean about what your contribution has been. Denial and blaming drain emotional strength and are often the precursors to anger: all are unproductive. And if you conclude that you didn't contribute to the outcome, admit that too: self-blaming and taking responsibility for an outcome over which you have no control is equally exhausting. There are times when others take irresponsible action and sometimes crud just happens.

The stuff you own, you can learn from. The stuff you don't own, leave behind.

Suggestion #2: Dialogue

Connect with those individuals or teams who have been and who have the capacity to be supportive. These are the people who willingly listen, who are empathic, and who can remind you of the strengths and capacities that you have.

Notice that these are not people who will play a rousing game of gee-ain't-it-awful with you or who have been unable to deal with setbacks themselves. They are not likely to encourage you to take the next step forward.

Instead, seek people who will engage you in honest dialogue about what has been learned, where you are standing now, what options are still open, and where you can go from here. These are people who have the ability to be realistic and who aren't afraid to tell you to give your head a shake when you are feeling sorry

for yourself or worrying too much about what you have lost rather than what you have.

Suggestion #3: Turn the page.

Yes, there is a time when it is appropriate to shake your fists and rail against what dirty, rotten thing just happened — while avoiding, of course, the easy temptation to feel sorry for yourself. And then, there is a time to turn the page and get on with where you were going.

One step back leads to two steps forward.

The very first self-help book I can remember was one that was titled, *What to Do Until the Psychiatrist Comes*. It was collected wisdom about how to achieve and secure positive mental health. If memory serves me correctly, the counsel offered was: have someone to love, something to look forward to, and something to do. Not bad! Few, if any, would argue with the wisdom of supportive relationships. The latter two — something to look forward to and something to do — help you to turn the page.

Set a short-term target or event that is achievable and would, once attained or done, provide you with some satisfaction. If the nature of the setback was personal, the something to look forward to might be attending a piece of theatre, a weekend at a country inn, or a specific time when you might be re-united with those whom you love. If the setback was in a work environment, the something to look forward to might be the acquisition of a new skill or the possibility of working on something new or innovative.

And then, do. Get busy and keep busy at activities that require your energy and move you forward. Active individuals have little time to worry, second-guess, stew, or be depressed.

Suggestion #4: Draw conclusions about what you have learned.

Once you have some distance from the setback, take stock of what you have learned ... about your emotional response, about your capacities, about your needs, about where you found support, about what you would do

differently, and about what you would do the same if a similar situation occurred.

This drawing of conclusions about what you have learned does require some distance from the time of the setback — otherwise you can't be clear-headed and objective.

Some of what you'll learn will delight you. "I didn't realize I had the ability to ..." or "I thought I wouldn't be able to ..." You'll discover strengths and personal assets you didn't think you had. Individuals who have been caught in organization down-sizing and unexpectedly found themselves on the street looking for a job often describe in amazement how resourceful they were and how much they failed to realize that they were stuck in a rut.

Other insights might distress you. "I didn't realize how much I depended on ..." or "I didn't like the fact that there was no logical explanation for what happened." In these situations, determine what you need to do to minimize such an impact in the future.

Suggestion # 5: Celebrate gains made.

It is much easier to live with a step backwards when it occurs — even if you don't like it — if you recognize that you can take two steps forward.

A setback may have meant a temporary loss but it also meant that you had an opportunity to gain something else or go somewhere else. Enjoy where you are going and avoid any worry about what might have been, by reminding yourself of the gains made. Take pride in the fact that you have the ability to, as the song goes, "pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again." Lesser mortals might have stayed down for the count.

Resilience, like perseverance, may be a seemingly old-fashioned quality that pioneers needed to get through the challenges of uncharted terrain. In many ways, we are pioneers in a changeable world that can deliver harsh blows and setbacks without a moment's notice. When you find that quality inside yourself, cherish it for all it's worth. It is, after all, the stuff of character.

A Final Check

When developing an education plan, think about the following questions. The more “yes” options you can check, the greater the chance that your plan will meet the needs of your internal business partners.

Does my education plan ...	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
1. consider current and emerging goals, values, and strategies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. mesh with the attitudes, skills, and knowledge the organization wants to develop?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. identify all the populations that can benefit from development opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. meet the needs of the target groups as they have been assessed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. include a variety of learning strategies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. have a set of standards for all the growth and development opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. have a practical focus to decrease the gap between information and application?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. have an overall theme that will link the ideas and build continuity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. contain content and delivery techniques geared to each target group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. have an evaluation process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

For more information about our services, contact us at (519) 664-2213.