

## minding your biz

# Staying positive in negative times

## Organizational Growth

BY BOB FAW

There are many inspirational stories of people succeeding despite facing terrible hardship, rejections or failures. The obvious ones are those famous people such as Oprah Winfrey, Jim Carrey, Dr. Seuss and J.K. Rowling.

All of these people were passionate about following their dreams through thick and thin. There are countless more people who have made meaningful contributions to the world who are less well known. Each of these people had many opportunities to give in to despair, to give up on their dreams, but they persisted.

For many of us, this is the toughest economic situation we've ever faced. It is a time when we need to focus on our goals, and to stay focused on what we need to do to reach them.

Too much stress, fear, and loss trigger "F Responses" (fight, flight and freeze) in our brains. In a work setting, this can cause problems, such as interpersonal conflict, mental freezing (causing us to miss opportunities),

self-pity, despair, burnout, running from problems and holding on too long to things that are not working.

It is possible to counter F Responses and create positive motivation through the use of three "Solution-Focus Change Questions":

- Goals? Clarifying what we are trying to attain together and why.
- What works? Listing all the things that we and others are doing that are already working towards this goal.
- What else? Brainstorming new ideas or approaches to achieving our goals together.

These three questions create positive direction, momentum and creativity – fast. In my experience, 95 percent of the problems that are brought up in tension-causing ways are dealt with more simply and effectively by answering these questions. This saves time and emotional energy that otherwise is often spent on blaming, defensiveness, avoidance, etc. If there are still problems to be dealt with after answering these questions, I find that people address them more positively and optimistically having already created significant momentum towards their goal(s).

Each question has specific benefits for the people answering them:

- Goals? It is part of being human to be regularly distracted from our goals by the

demands of the day, the stressors of the moment and the frustrations caused by problems. It can be easy to become focused on fixing problems that may have little impact on our actual goals, particularly in interpersonal dynamics. Answering this question helps to refocus ourselves on the point of why we're doing what we're doing.

- What works? This question helps us build

### *Some tips to overcoming the mental traps our brains can fall into when things go bad*

upon momentum that already exists by first asking about our past successes. Confidence is built by focusing on capabilities, attitudes, tools and resources we already have. It helps us to remember to do what has been successful when we might otherwise have left it behind unnoticed and unappreciated. Then we focus on what is currently working for others.

This broadens our focus by learning from others' best practices as well. These conversa-

tions also help motivate people to strive to create best practices that will be mentioned in such discussions in the future. Additionally, motivational pride is enhanced while answering this question.

I've noticed with many clients that "What works?" is rarely used during most teams' problem-solving. Missing this step often lowers morale, creates meetings most people loathe and commonly instigates the dreaded Blame Game.

• What else? I find that this question is very helpful when used after the "What's working" discussion, as it continues to increase the momentum even more and thus it is far easier to keep focused on solutions and away from blame.

It is helpful for "thinking out of the box" regularly, too. Allowing a free flow of ideas on other alternatives is the fundamental step in innovation and it harnesses a sense of vitality and creativity in teams. Done well, it cultivates a culture in which ideation is rewarded and innovation is fostered. It is crucial to have commonly agreed upon brainstorming guidelines during this stage. **NHR**

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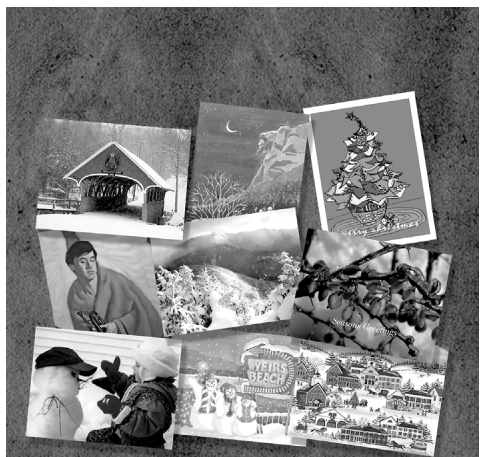
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