



C H A P T E R 1

Stay Calm

“He that would be superior to external influences must first become superior to his own passions.”

—BENJAMIN DISRAELI

You have a wonderful brain with 100 billion cells, more powerful than any supercomputer ever built. Your mind can store libraries of information throughout your life, which you can access through your memory in a couple of seconds. You have all the intelligence and mental resources you will ever need to deal with any crunch you ever face.

In addition, your thoughts are extraordinarily powerful, with the ability to make you mad or glad, positive or negative, excited or calm. The thoughts you think determine the emotions that you experience. When you find yourself at a crunch point, when you experience a sudden setback or reversal, your very first job is to seize control of your thoughts and feelings to ensure that you perform at your best.

Assert Control Immediately

On the wall of one of my classrooms in school was a poster showing an extremely agitated man. It said, "When excited or in doubt, run in circles, scream, and shout." Unfortunately, this is what many people do in a crunch.

The natural tendency when things go wrong is to react or *overreact* in a negative way. You may become angry, upset, disappointed, or afraid. These stressful thoughts and negative emotions immediately start to shut down major parts of your brain, including your *neocortex*, the thinking part of your brain, which you use to analyze, assess, and solve problems and make decisions.

If you do not immediately and consciously assert mental and emotional control in crunch time, you will automatically resort to the fight-or-flight reaction. When things go wrong, you will want to either counterattack or retreat, neither of which may be the right strategy in a crisis situation.

Take a Deep Breath

The starting point of staying calm in a crisis is for you to refuse to react automatically and unthinkingly. Instead, take a deep breath to calm your mind and then think carefully about your next words and actions.

Imagine that everyone is watching. Imagine that this situation is a *test* to see what you are truly made of. See yourself as a leader; you set the tone for those who look up to you. Imagine that everyone is waiting to see how you will respond. Resolve to set a good example, to be a role model for others, to demonstrate the correct way to deal with a major problem, as if you were giving a lesson.

The primary source of negative emotions is frustrated expectations. You expected a thing to happen in a particular way and something altogether different has happened. You immediately respond in a negative way. This is quite normal. But you must resist this natural tendency.

Recognize the Two Biggest Enemies

The two major forms of negative emotions triggered by a crisis or setback are the fear of *failure* and the fear of *rejection*. Either of them can cause anger, depression, or paralysis.

You experience the fear of failure when you are threatened with the loss of money, customers, position, or reputation, or in the extreme, the life or well-being of another person. This possibility of failure or loss, especially regarding money, triggers the emotions of anxiety, stress, or even panic.

The fear of rejection is closely associated with the fear of criticism or disapproval, or failing to measure up to the expectations of others. When something goes wrong, you may feel as if you are not capable or competent. You feel embarrassed and deficient. You lose face. Your ego is threatened. These reactions are normal and natural. All that matters, however, is how you deal with these fears.

Remember, your *response* to the crisis is everything. This is the test. Instead of overreacting, take a deep breath, relax, and resolve to deal with the problem calmly and effectively.

Your Inner Dialogue Determines Your Emotions

Psychologist Martin Seligman has determined that your *explanatory style* largely determines your thoughts, emotions, and subsequent actions. Your explanatory style is defined as “the way you explain things to yourself.”

Fully 95 percent of your emotions, positive or negative, are determined by the way you interpret the things that are happening around you, by the way you talk to yourself. If you interpret the unexpected setback in a constructive way, you will remain calm and in control.

Although your mind can contain thousands of thoughts, it can hold only one thought at a time, and you are always free to choose that thought at any given moment. Whatever thought you

choose at the moment will determine whether you become angry and flustered or remain calm and collected.

Remember that most things in life don't work out, at least initially. Remind yourself that problems and difficulties are a normal and natural part of life. They are unavoidable. The only thing you can control is how you deal with them.

Keep yourself calm by refusing to *catastrophize*. Refuse to interpret the problem as overwhelmingly negative. Very few things are ever as bad as they seem initially. The four most important words for dealing with any crisis are these: "This too shall pass."

Study the Problem Before You Respond

Instead of overreacting, keep yourself calm by asking questions of the other people involved. Listen patiently to the answers. If there is a solution, your job is to find it by fully understanding what has happened before you respond.

Sometimes, talking over the problem with a spouse or trusted friend will help immensely to keep you calm and controlled. Go for a long walk and review the situation, examining it from every angle, seeking a possible solution. Remain optimistic, no matter what is going on. Look for something *good* in the problem or situation. Very often, what appears to be a major setback is an opportunity in disguise. The complete failure of a project, process, or business venture may be exactly what you need because it may compel you to channel your time and resources in another direction.

Seek the Valuable Lesson

No matter what happens, seek the valuable lesson in every difficulty and setback. Within every problem you face, there is *the seed of an equal or greater benefit or advantage*. When you discipline yourself to look for the good in the situation, and to seek the valuable lessons that the situation or crisis might contain, you

automatically remain calm, positive, and optimistic. As a result, all the powers of your wonderful mind remain available to you to solve the problem or resolve the crisis.

When you face crunch time, take a few minutes to close your eyes, breath deeply, and visualize yourself as calm, confident, relaxed, and in complete control. Resolve to be positive and optimistic around other people. Speak kindly and courteously. Act as if you don't have a care in the world, and that whatever has happened, it is not really bothering you at all.

Crunch Point Actions

1. Look into any problem or crisis you are facing for something good, a benefit of some kind. Often your biggest problem is an opportunity in disguise.

2. Seek the valuable lesson in every setback or difficulty. Imagine that your problem has been sent to you at this time to teach you something you need to know to be more successful and happy in the future.

“Never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.”

—HARRIET BEECHER STOWE