

How Do You Handle a Crisis?

by Margaret J. Marcuson

We've all experienced those crisis moments: the phone call comes, or you open the e-mail, and disaster, small or large, has struck. What's your first response in a crisis? Your first reaction may be to panic. Your heart starts to pound. Your body is overtaken by anxiety. What should you do now?

Here are five tips for handling a crisis. Tips one and two will help you respond better in the moment the crisis breaks.

1. **Focus on yourself first.** Your own functioning is critical: you need to handle yourself, not the crisis. Panic is contagious. But so is calm, and if you can keep your own anxiety down, everyone will make better decisions.
2. **Breathe.** Oxygen literally helps your brain work better. When you feel your heart start pounding, stop and take a few deep breaths.

Over time, keep focusing on your own functioning, and keep breathing. Some crises take some time to resolve. The following tips will help you as you continue to respond.

3. **Think.** If you can reflect on the crisis rather than simply reacting to it, you'll be better able to manage yourself. Here are some questions to consider: Why now? (Crises usually don't come out of nowhere.) Who else besides me needs to share this responsibility? What's the worst that could happen, and how would I handle that?
4. **Get thoughtful counsel.** We often go looking for advice in a crisis, but choose your advisers carefully. Look for those who can ask good questions, and offer a bit of a challenge along with the necessary hand-holding. Spend time with people who are calmer than you are.
5. **Pray.** Or meditate, or whatever works to help you get the bigger picture. And there's always a bigger picture. No crisis is ultimate. The story will always go on, and when we can tap into a larger hope, we will lead better, especially in crisis.

Most crises are not as disastrous as the initial panic indicates. Even if the worst happens, whatever that may be for you, this approach will continue to help you. But if you can keep your head, and thoughtfully take steps to respond, often the turmoil will subside, and you can keep moving forward toward your goals.

<http://www.margaretmarcuson.com/>