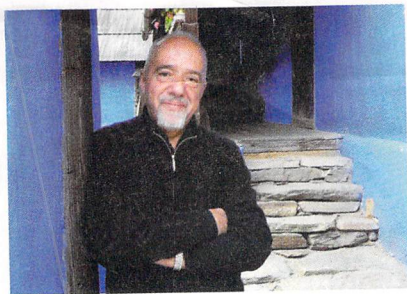


what not to do when trouble strikes

Last month I wrote here about what happens when we underestimate the warning signals that appear before a problem hits us with full force. Now I want to follow up on the dynamics of individual crisis. Once a crisis has begun, here are the worst ways to react:



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Ignore the problem. Mary knows that John, her husband, is about to be fired from his job, which will make it hard for their family to survive. However, as John doesn't mention the matter, she pretends she doesn't know.

Deny the problem. John, for his part, thinks he will soon find another opportunity, thanks to all the contacts he has made through the years, therefore doesn't see that he is in a difficult situation. He forgets that one of the hardest rules of life, brought to light by Jesus, is "to those that have little, the little they have will be taken from them." At the moment he loses his job, all these contacts become meaningless, because John will no longer have anything to offer in exchange.

Refuse to ask for help. John and Mary have spent many years together, and know each other extremely well. John is preoccupied with the problems at work, which saps all his energy. Mary could help him—but pride does not let him share his difficulties. The result is that John sinks further and further into the depths of his difficulties.

Lie or tell half-truths. One day, Mary gathers courage and asks if something is wrong. John answers: "I'm thinking of changing jobs." Clearly, from a literal point of view, this may be considered true. Mary does not say anything else. The pressure John feels now increases, because he suspects his wife knows something, but now that he has lied, he can no longer use the truth to save himself.

The thing
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Blame others. John knows he is a reputable man, who has always been honest and given the best of himself at work. He thinks his boss is unfair and he doesn't deserve what is happening. But perhaps his boss is living the same drama, due to pressures from the abstract organization known as a company. Instead of keeping a cool head to try and make the best of the situation, John comes to think the world is made up of evil and cruel people.

Overestimate one's own capability. John begins telling himself over and over that as he has talent, he can accomplish remarkable things, and ends up convincing himself that he is not facing a crisis, but embracing a new opportunity. John has a lot of talent, but that won't be enough, because he is not ready for the coming blow, which will take away his breath and crush his enthusiasm.

Because of all these destructive reactions, John is unprepared for the day when he is finally fired. From then on, the family is on the brink of ruin, because of the valuable time wasted by denying the impending disaster.

What to do then? Well, I have been through many crises and made all the mistakes described above. Yet even in the worst of times, friends have appeared. So I know now that the first and most important thing to do when a serious problem arises is to ask for help. Instead of trying to seem strong, I am now willing to be vulnerable with my wife and friends. And that helps me make many fewer