



The Glory of Obstacles

“All the adversity I’ve had in my life, all my troubles and obstacles, have strengthened me... You may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you.” - Walt Disney

“Houston, we have a problem.”

The radio transmission from the Apollo 13 command module stunned the entire world. Our worst fears seemed to be coming true: *Were the astronauts all going to die? Would this end the space program?*

Yet in the end, many considered the Apollo 13 mission to be NASA’s finest hour, requiring courage, ingenuity, teamwork and a never-flagging commitment to bring the astronauts home alive, which they did.

One of the basic tenets of coaching is to enable the client to view obstacles – whether themselves, their attitudes and beliefs, the lack of resources, their goals and much else from new perspectives and open up possibilities leading to success. This is the principle of “re-framing.”

In their book “Action Trumps Everything,” business and educational moguls Charles Kiefer and Leonard Schlessinger came up with the phrase: “Creaction.” Simply stated, creaction involves three steps: 1) Act, 2) Learn, 3) Repeat. “Creaction treats encountering obstacles and getting blown off course as *positive* (emphasis mine) and values opportunities to reconceive what is wanted.” In other words, creaction is the evolution of an idea from an initially flawed yet inventive or innovative concept to a successful end product or completed goal.

The simplest way to reframe the situation is to reframe your feedback:

From	What is wrong?	To	What do you want?
From	Who caused this?	To	How can we learn from this?
From	Why did this happen to us?	To	How did this happen?
From	How does this limit us?	To	How is this an opportunity?

Another method of reframing is to ask yourself:

1. “What are the conditions when we don’t have this problem (or it’s not *that* bad if not outright good)?”
2. What can we do to make the exception (good or better outcome) occur more often?
 - a. Explore the differences in environments between the two outcomes.

A favorite coaching modality/exercise I like to use for planning in which we *anticipate* obstacles is known as “The Disney Method.” Walt Disney was well known for keeping his projects’ teams separated into three groups: Dreamers, Realists and Critics. All communication between dreamers and critics had to pass through the realists, no direct communication was allowed between dreamers and critics. In this way, the dreamer is allowed to freeform - to brainstorm if you will - setting no limits to their imagination which is the strength they contribute to the creative team. Meantime, the critics will not suffer persecution for their inputs like being accused of being negative.

The Disney method allows the client to step into each of these roles and finally, in the role of realist, take an objective look at all ideas and inputs. After free-forming in the relaxed dreamer state, go to the critic state and give yourself the freedom to criticize as you see fit. It is in the critic state that you

will most likely encounter future objections and obstacles.

Finally, in the role of realist, ask yourself:

- Are there “truths” in the critic’s comments?
- How can these “nuggets” be addressed and/or planned for?
- What resources will you need to face these concerns?
- Is there something you haven’t thought of?
- In general these questions should take the following form:
 - How else?
 - What else?
 - Who else?
 - Where else? And
 - When else?

The genius of Disney is particularly effective in anticipating difficulties and developing plans for successfully dealing with those obstacles.

Another of my favorite coaching tools for anticipating obstacles is what Danish philosopher Kierkegaard and I call “Living Life Backwards.” I will deal with this in a future article on developing strategic plans.

This is a good time to re-evaluate the four main questions of coaching as they relate to the stalled or blocked end goal:

1. What do you want?
2. How might you go about getting it?

3. How will you commit to the plan?
4. How will you know you've achieved it (establishing metrics)?

When confronted by obstacles that stubbornly persist, revisit your passions. Is there a new source of motivation that can keep you going? In the case of Apollo Thirteen, the original goal of landing on the moon didn't matter anymore. Bringing the astronauts home safe was all that mattered. In the heroic accomplishment of just that, NASA built an atmosphere of teamwork close to that of Charlie Company of the 101st Airborne as depicted in "Band of Brothers." These men cared for each other in a way rarely seen among men. This teamwork was later critical in the development of the Space Shuttle, one of the highest technical marvels in the history of mankind.

With a reconsideration of your end-goals in mind, look for a Space Shuttle outcome. As NASA dreamers already know, the sky is *not* the limit. Now go and re-create your future!

Thanks and blessings,

Larry Skahill



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