

SHIRLEY OSBORNE

SURVIVE AND THRIVE

**How to stay ahead of the curve
in a time of crisis**

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curve in a time of crisis**

Shirley Osborne

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How to stay ahead of the curve in a time of crisis
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Over the course of many years, I have taught, supported and guided women through times of crisis, up and out into safety, security, fulfilment and joy. I have taught girl children, teenagers and women ranging in age from college students to great grandmothers well over eighty years old, in many different parts of our world.

I have learned as much from them as I hope they have learnt from me and this book is just some of the teachings exchanged among and between us. It is offered in honour of them all.

Shirley Osborne
Montserrat
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FOREWORD

It is the middle of the year 2021.

I'm in crisis. You're in crisis. Everybody is in crisis. The whole world is in crisis.

What's a crisis?

A crisis is a time of intense difficulty or danger.

All around the world, from the early part of the year 2020 has been a time of intense difficulty and danger for all of us.

A highly-contagious and very deadly disease that has spread around the whole world, shutting down whole countries, upending entire industries, wreaking havoc on people's lives, causing confusion and fear, and death and despair everywhere would, I am sure you will agree, qualify as a time of intense difficulty and danger.

This is what the year 2020 brought to us – a “*novel coronavirus*” so contagious, so difficult to manage or contain and with no known, generally-effective cure that it has confounded scientists and frustrated governments. And with no end clearly in sight.

There are varied and wide-ranging questions and controversies surrounding its origins. Governments accusing other governments of mal-intent. Some groups of people insisting that it was spread intentionally, more rational minds suggesting it could not have been. Scientists and medical professionals disagree vehemently among themselves. Accusations fly around like clouds of starlings. Governments are accused of hoarding resources, and price gouging and profiteering is said to be rife among big corporations, especially the pharmaceuticals - all of this sublimely exacerbated by conspiracy theories and flat-out denials from quite large sectors of the regular citizenry.

In August 2020, Sarah Zhang wrote in *The Atlantic*, “*The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has sickened more than 16.5 million people across six continents. It is raging in countries that never contained the virus. It is resurging in many of the ones that did. If there was ever a time when this coronavirus could be contained, it has probably*

passed. One outcome is now looking almost certain: This virus is never going away... The coronavirus is simply too widespread and too transmissible.”

In addition to being a catastrophe of major proportions as far as the health of many millions of people is concerned, this particular crisis has also been devastating to the economies of entire countries and to the private finances of many millions of individuals and their families. It caused entire countries to be shut down, business to be stopped, pleasures denied – the mundane as well as the luxurious. It resulted in travel being brought to a standstill, socializing “distanced” and even the performance of important rites such as funerals, weddings and graduations denied.

The general consensus was that these changes to human activity would remain with us for quite a while; that not much change is likely over the short- to medium-term.

Zhang also wrote, “Even when a much-anticipated vaccine arrives, it is likely to only suppress but never completely eradicate the virus. For context, consider that vaccines exist for more than a dozen human viruses but only one, smallpox, has ever been eradicated from the planet, and that took 15 years of immense global coordination.”

The outlook is troubling. The challenge is clear. Crystal clear. We are going to have to learn to live with these changes – and this threat – for the foreseeable future. We are going to have to figure out how to navigate the new paradigms and find the community security, general satisfactions, personal safety and social successes that we need and desire.

That was five years ago. Now, the world is facing yet another global conflagration. There can be no question or doubt about the origins of this – not of where it began, by whom it was started, nor of whom the profiteers are.

This crisis is being caused by Man. More specifically, it is being brought upon us by savage men intent on exerting supremacy over the earth; greedy men intent on hoarding the earth’s resources; ego-driven men wanting the domination of all species and all activities of all the species of the earth; primitive men wishing to reduce women to the category of servant, slave and chattel; irrational men driven by religion and ignorance once again claiming divine decree for both their violence and their assumptions of racial and gender superiority.

Where it will end no-one can say with any degree of certainty, nor can any thinking person deny that it is indeed a crisis of dire proportions.

The characters of this particular crisis are very different to those of the pandemic of five years ago. Like the pandemic of 2020, this crisis is causing inestimable death

and immeasurable grief, but it is also engendering deep and great and very likely, irremediable harm to relationships among many millions of people. People are being killed by the tens and hundreds of thousands and while those who remain are forced to watch, resist if possible, endure anyhow, and prepare to gather the pieces afterwards so that we might attempt to put them back together and make another try, again, at civilizing ourselves.

How to cope, survive and thrive after this new wave of horrors is the question to which I will offer you some suggestions in this book. It is not a big book. It is not long on words or heavy on the brain. That is by design.

This is information that is good and helpful, and advice that will be effective if conscientiously and intentionally put into action, but who has the time, in a time of crisis such as we are having to live through in 2025, to read a long, complicated epistle?

The State of the World – a brief and incomplete rendering

Men fighting, killing themselves and others, driven by greed and the lust for power

In a world that counts one hundred and ninety-three (193) countries, the Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Online Portal (RULAC) of the Geneva Academy is currently monitoring one hundred and ten (110) armed conflicts.

Armed conflicts consist in the use of armed force between two or more organized armed groups, governmental or non-governmental.

1. There are more than 45 armed conflicts are currently taking place throughout the Middle East and North Africa in the following territories: Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Yemen and Western Sahara.
2. In Africa there are more than 35 non-international armed conflicts taking place in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.
3. Asia is the theatre of 19 non-international armed conflicts involving 19 armed groups. These are happening in Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, and the Philippines.
4. Two international armed conflicts – between respectively India and Pakistan and between India and China – are also taking place in the region.

5. In Europe, Russia is occupying Crimea, Moldova, South Ossetia and Georgia. Armenia is at war in Azerbaijan. There is armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine and two non-international armed conflicts in Ukraine involving Donetsk and Luhansk.
6. The six non-international armed conflicts that are taking place in Latin America are split evenly between Mexico and Colombia.
7. In 2025, the United States threatened the invasion of Greenland, Panama, Canada, Mexico and bombed Iran. More recently, it has declared itself at war in general, changed its Department of Defense to Department of War, put its military on the streets of its own cities and engaged armed conflict against Venezuela.
8. In many of the major cities across Europe and the United States, and in majority Muslim countries there are ongoing protests and clashes between police and civilians resisting immigration, fascism, big tech, government corruption, overreach and support for Israeli occupation, invasion and genocide in the Middle East.
9. In some African countries, there are frequent protests against political corruption and the failures of local government, and against colonialism and continuing interference and exploitation by Western governments and multinational corporations.
10. In Indonesia, there has been a quite severe eruption of protest against the government that eventually devolved into violence.
11. The majority of the conflicts are non-international (NIACs), involving a multitude of armed non-state actors and many of them also involve foreign interventions by Western powers, Russia, and neighbouring countries.

Men harming women, intent on submission and control

The fight against women's autonomy, empowerment and equality continues unabated globally, but is also now increasing in intensity in the West. In countries such as the United States and the major states of Western Europe, men are vociferously claiming violation of some assumed god-given right to rule over women, and accusing women of usurping the natural order and depriving them of women's care, attention and labour. They declare themselves victims of feminism.

1. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has designated public speaking by women as a moral violation, and thus coming "closer than ever to achieving its vision of a society that completely erases women from public life", according to UN Women.
2. The United States continues to roll back landmark legislation that protects women's rights, while state and fundamentalist religious actors declare themselves intent on removing women from public office, and having women resume some "divinely-ordained" position as only men's servers and child-bearers.
3. In Europe, women's rights are being eroded on a daily basis as more and more men and fundamentalist religious organisations are declaring women's place to be only that of serving the needs of men.
4. In some circles, men assert that there is a "war against men" in progress and proffer as remedy, the silencing of women and the reduction of women's autonomy and civic freedoms.

*“You drown not by falling into a river,
but by staying submerged in it.”*

- Paulo Coelho

I.

What the Romans Knew

Praemonitus, praemunitus.

No! This is not a spell or incantation from Harry Potter and his kind, but it does work a bit like magic. It is a Latin proverb that translates into English as *“Forewarned is forearmed”*.

Though we no longer speak Latin in today’s world, we know from records that for much of their history the Roman soldierly class were brave and disciplined tacticians. Roman armies conquered and held vast swathes of the world because individually and as a collective, the Romans understood the power of information and the supremacy of prior knowledge. Forewarned is forearmed says, literally, that prior knowledge of possible dangers or problems gives you a tactical advantage. The Romans sought these, assiduously, and used them to winning effect for several centuries.

This old adage is applicable to every situation in our lives, and is of especial criticality in times of crisis. What does that mean? Let us remind ourselves that a crisis is a time of intense difficulty or danger. Disaster and Crisis Management professionals tell us that there are events and then sometimes they are followed by crises. An event is not itself a crisis but always precedes a crisis, although a crisis does not always follow upon an event, even a catastrophic event. This is true even at the individual level.

The definition for crisis includes the word “time”; it says “a time of” not “a moment of” and that is an important distinction. A crisis does not happen in a flash. A crisis develops over time and occurs when the entity acted upon by the event is limited in its ability to respond, i.e. its financial or other resources are scarce and that scarcity limits its ability to provide or obtain for itself, the necessary relief.

So, for example, a hurricane is an event about which we are always forewarned days in advance. If you drive a vehicle, it is quite likely that at some point you will have an accident. You are forewarned. If either of these events were to come to pass in your life and you had been forearmed with house, car or health insurance; if you were forearmed with information and a support system; if you were forearmed with some financial resources, you could possibly have a difficult time getting things back on track, but you would not necessarily descend into crisis. You would have the resources to respond in ways that would ensure that things didn't get worse.

We cannot always predict a crisis. We are not always able to see danger ahead or trouble on the horizon. However, given that a crisis always follows an event, it is reasonable to assume that one should be able to see the possibility or probability that a crisis will ensue after a certain kind of event, given the availability of necessary resources. Being able to prevent or mitigate it depends on what's available.

In reality, we often are not able to avoid crisis. In fact, crisis will certainly come to each of us at some time in our lives. How well we deal with any crisis, though, the condition we find ourselves in after it has passed, is a different though related matter and is what truly matters in the long run, and again, depends on what resources are available to us as remedy.

The OpsCentre, an Australian business continuity consultancy, writes on its website that, *“crisis management plans are typically made when the crisis has come about, even if, arguably, you should be able to see a business crisis coming and avoid it, rather than experience it.”*

Of course, some crises, even some of those that affect us in the deepest personal ways, are not subject to our influence at all before they arrive on our doorsteps. We would have had no influence over the events causing them either. Often, we have no power whatsoever to stop them, slow them down or even to protect ourselves entirely from their effects even when we do have information and resources. Some crises are just not avoidable and not responsive to any action of ours.

The 2020 CoVid-19 pandemic falls into this category. We didn't start it. We did everything they told us to and we still caught it and suffered all the other consequences of its existence. Many of us died, in spite of everything we did. Some major fallout from this roving virus was impossible to avoid, so far-ranging has it and its effects been. What began as a health issue, that theoretically could be

avoidable for most people, has morphed into a social catastrophe, an education systems nightmare, worldwide travel bans and a full-blown economic crisis, among other things.

Our primary objective in this landscape was to survive. Our options and our strategies included protecting ourselves as best we could; doing our very best to avoid contracting the disease, continuing to do the work we do, as far as that was possible, taking care of our loved ones and preparing for after – because there would be an after, and whether we thrived in that “after” would be influenced to very large degree by the quality of our passage through this peril.

We, individually, could have no noticeable effect on this particular crisis, even if we ran the world’s largest corporation or most powerful government, even if we were the richest, healthiest, best-informed, most powerful person in the world, even if we were the most experienced epidemiologist on earth, even if we were the head of the most populous religion in creation.

It made sense therefore, that in this kind of crisis, we focus on the things upon which we can have some effect and thus assist the collection of actions that would make things better for us and those close to us. Those “factors” upon which we can act are, first of all, ourselves, our state of mind, our response to the times and other aspects of our individual lives, and then perhaps the lives of the people we love and those to whom we can be of service. In this regard, with this option available, it makes sense that we seek out groups within which we might act, working on the premise that there is strength in numbers.

In order to do any of this successfully, in any time of crisis, we must get ourselves informed. We must, as far as possible, seek to be forewarned and we must look ahead and try to discern the possible and probable outcomes and future occurrences. That way, we are enabled to act in ways that would shorten the crisis and increase our ability to survive and afterwards, to thrive.

We often can do nothing to prevent the triggering event itself, but we almost always can do something to reduce the impact over time and either prevent a crisis in our personal lives or lessen its effects.

Praemonitus, praemunitus.

II.

Ignorance is dangerous and deadly



There are people who belong to the schools of “Ignorance is bliss” and “What you don’t know can’t hurt you”.

Yes, of course, we can all acknowledge that ignorance and sometimes protect us from some forms of stress. Sometimes. For a time! We know that. We just don’t necessarily agree that it is generally wiser to remain or to wish to remain in ignorance than to know or seek to know about anything at all. We believe that

knowledge is power and that not knowing does not keep us safe. In fact, it is often downright dangerous and deadly.

Let's say you've somehow managed to get yourself blissfully lost on the train tracks somewhere but you don't know that these are train tracks and that trains are big machines that will crush you to a blot if you stand in their way, and furthermore, there is one on the way. You are going to get run over, but you don't know any of this, so you're not the least bit worried or frightened. So, the train runs you over and you die instantly. What you did not know did hurt you!

If you don't know, you don't fret, worry or get anxious, and that is obviously an enjoyable condition, unless, of course, you know that it is important to know and so you wish you did know and you fret about the not knowing! We will not argue with "*Ignorance is bliss.*" We will accept it at face value.

It is categorically untrue, however, that "*What you don't know can't hurt you.*" That train is going to hurt you even if you do not know that it is coming. There can be no argument there. If you did know that it was coming, you could theoretically, figure out a strategy and get yourself out of harm's way. If that is not possible, you still have the option of readying yourself for what's coming. And that is a factor of no mean value.

There are times when there is absolutely no escape – firing squad comes to mind. You will be very much – and probably, distressingly painfully – aware that you are facing a firing squad. Your only option is to prepare yourself and face your death with some measure of dignity.

There are other times when it might seem that there is absolutely no escape, no out, no recovery and yet...and yet...the way the Universe works, something happens, we do escape, we do get out, we do recover...we survive and we go on to thrive.

So, let us look at some of the things we can do, some of the approaches we can take to help us get safely through crises that do not involve ignorance, firing squads or trains.

Know that the pieces of advice and wisdom shared herein comprise a system that you can apply to any situation of crisis or of impending crisis. Most often, the factors that most deeply affect our ability to survive a crisis are the decisions we make along the way about the quality of our response. The strategies articulated in this book will help you figure out the strategy best suited to you, your store of resources and your will to survive and then go on to thrive in your "life after the crisis".

III.

Perception Matters

Perception matters, perception determines our approach and perception is shaped by information.

Most important, in a time of crisis, is information. It is only with correct and adequate that one can understand exactly what the situation is and determine what would be required as response and for possible relief. It is necessary to know the nature of the event that precedes the crisis. One must understand the probabilities, possibilities and options for a potential recurrence of the event, worsening of the crisis and eventual recovery. It is imperative to know as much as possible so as to be able to calculate one's ability to recover independent of help of any kind, and also to know what resources might be available in the community to help folks exit the crisis.

In any case, a response is necessary. *'Sit quietly and wait it out'* is not generally the most productive response to a crisis. It could possibly be an option, of course, because everything is temporary, and a crisis, no matter how severe, will eventually pass. So you will get out of crisis sooner or later, but a do nothing approach will leave you wherever it will leave you, however, and that might be not a good place at

all. You will have no control over the outcome, and must, in the end, just make do with whatever it is that you end up with.

We are human. We are thinking and rational beings. We are creatures of action. We create things. We fix things. We do not, as a general rule, just sit still on the side and let the river of life flow on by. We do not just sit and suffer while things are done to us. Generally, we push back sooner or later and try to take the initiative. For that, we need information, and the better the quality of that information, the more successful our outcomes will be.

So, another requirement for responding successfully to any crisis is action – focused and appropriate action, taken upon investigation of the situation. Appropriate action can only be taken upon your having acquired a good understanding of the problem and what makes it a crisis rather than simply a temporary rough spot or a fleeting difficult moment. Otherwise, we are shooting in the dark and any headway we might make will be inconstant, insufficient and unreliable.

It is critical that we get to know the details – what exactly is happening, what the causes, timelines and effects are – obvious and potential – on us and on our environment, who precisely it is affecting and how, probabilities and predictions for the short and the longer terms, and so on. It is also critical that we take targeted and appropriate action.

In order to successfully confront a crisis, we must examine it from every angle so as to understand what we can do to circumvent or to mitigate its negative effects – and as conflicting as it might sound, we must also try to discern if there is any positive whatsoever that can be made to come out of the troubles. It is imperative that, as early as possible, we try to figure out what is required of us immediately and what might be necessary later on.

The quality of our understanding of the issue will inform the validity and effectiveness of our response to it, of course. So, how we see it and how we perceive ourselves acting within it or being affected by it are critical to our being able to navigate the rough waters of it. The goal is always to arrive in port safe and sound, all in one piece. We want to come through the storm intact, with all our faculties and our pieces still fitting together perfectly. We want to come out stronger, more resilient, and wiser than when it entered our lives. That is an important consideration because in the aftermath of a crisis there is always repair work to be done that will demand, sometimes, just as broad an outlay of resources and energy as surviving the crisis itself did.

Know this, also: there is always a crisis looming somewhere. Crises will come and they will go and they will come again. Know also that making your way successfully through one can strengthen you for the other one that will surely come. Once you've done hard things, it is easier for you to do hard things. Each crisis is a new learning

moment and a test of what you already know; it is an opportunity to hone skills and gather wisdom, to extend your boundaries and expand your resourcefulness and capabilities.

The immediate goal is to survive. The ultimate mission is to thrive. Those are made possible by information and will.

What you perceive about the risks you're up against, the nature of the crisis and the possibility of recovery, will determine your response. Ensure that your perception is fully and appropriately informed. Perception has a potent influence on our view of reality and that view determines how we respond. In a time of crisis, you have to be clear. Informed decisions are critical. This is not a time to take chances.

How to get informed:

1. Listen to the news.
2. Use Google.
3. Call people and ask – friends, family, radio and tv stations, government offices.
4. Go out into your community, if it is possible and safe.

IV.

Make the Decision that you will survive

The experiences we encounter along our life's journey show up for us generally as a result of one thing – a decision that was made; most often, as adults, as a decision that we, ourselves, made. Bear in mind that not specifically deciding to do or not do something is also a decision you make and that it will, like every other decision, bring its consequences with it. This is not a cliché. If you do not make a decision, you have still decided. You have decided not to make a decision on something and you have, therefore, decided to allow fate – or somebody else – to have its way. Repeat: you have actually made a decision. And that decision will have consequences with which you will still have to contend.

Even in the midst of an event that you had no power to prevent, a hurricane say, how it affects you, how you get through it and whether it escalates into a crisis in your personal life afterwards are determined in important respects by decisions that you make during or after, or that you made before the hurricane. A hurricane comes with warnings. In these technological times, each one comes with many days of advance warning and with deep detail about its characteristics. Your personal ability to escape unscathed and not descend into personal crisis depends on what you decide to do having heard that a hurricane is on its way.

How did you end up living in a known hurricane zone? Did you decide, before any hurricanes were on their way, to ensure that your house was strong enough to withstand hurricane winds and waters, for example, and if you had doubts did you seek safer shelter during the event? Did you decide to not purchase homeowners'

insurance? Did you provision adequately in advance of the storm? Did you ensure that your valuables were securely stored? Your animals? Your dependents?

If the destruction wrought by a hurricane is such that it is followed by a crisis in your community – buildings and homes destroyed, many people hurt or rendered homeless; if there is flooding or landslides; if roads and communications systems are blocked; utilities disabled – the crisis still need not disrupt or extend too deeply into your own life. Of course, if you also lost your home or your crops or someone dear to you, you will have a difficult time of it; you will struggle with grief, no electricity, no fresh running water, for instance, but it will not become a crisis unless you do not have the resources to e.g. replace those when the grids come back on line, or to repair your home; or to buy food.

In any case, you will have to, at some point, decide exactly what your response to the event is going to be and how to deal with the crisis should it have arisen. You will need to decide where you want to be when it ends, as in, what condition you intend that your life be in – will it have been depleted or will you have added to it and will you have elevated or expanded as a person and if so how? In what ways?

It is important that you understand that as difficult as crisis situations can be and as painful and debilitating as they often are, it is possible for individuals to find ways to grow internally and improve the quality of their lives, so that they come through the crisis stronger, wiser and indeed, as better human beings than they were before. It is up to you to make that decision and work at it and it is a very helpful thing to do to because, for one, it gives you something to focus on other than the trials and pains of the crisis and it sensitizes you to opportunities that can help you better weather the storm. As a matter of fact, that kind of approach and decision-making tends to bring those opportunities your way as if you had specifically asked for them and been granted your desires. The act of deciding significantly reduces stress, makes everything easier, flow more freely, work out better overall.

In times of crisis, it is often just real hard to even just put one foot in front of the other day after day, but put that foot in front we must, if we intend to survive. And we must decide. Often, we must decide anew every day, every hour just so as to keep ourselves going and getting out of the pits of despair. It is never easy, but do it we must; find the strength and the direction, we must. Sometimes it will be all we can do even to think of the decision, and sometimes that is all that we need to do, just think about the decision, say it out loud as often as we can. Sometimes, that alone will get us through a difficult moment or two, and that is progress. Even that is strengthening and fortifying.

If you just want your old life back, say so. If you want that and something else, say so. If you want an entirely different life after the crisis, tell yourself what exactly that will look like and tell yourself often. Picture it inside your head. Daydream about it. Imagine what you will feel when it arrives, who you will share it with and how they

will feel sharing it with you. Remember to tell yourself that it could take some time, that the crisis can't last forever, that you shall survive it, that you are tough enough and that you are worthy and that you are enough.

There will be those moments when you will release yourself into despair. There will be those moments when you will feel as if there is no way out or that it is just too much for you to try anymore. There will be those moments when you will feel as if you are alone in the world, even if there are people around you with whom you share loving relationships. Know that these moments will come. Prepare yourself to get through them by sharing your decisions and intentions with a trusted person. When you feel like you are being battered and bettered by the crisis, call on this person and allow him or her to help you through, allow yourself to receive and accept the support. Be sure to agree beforehand on what the signals and the boundaries will be. If your trusted persons are also in crisis, this arrangement can be reciprocal and therefore be even more valuable for each of you.

The important thing is to make a decision. Record it. Write it out in your own hand and keep it somewhere then refer to it constantly.

There will probably come those times of emotional crisis when you will be so deep in the doldrums that you will find it difficult to drum up the energy to read what you have written and sometimes even if you do succeed, you will just feel like ripping the paper to shreds, pulling the covers up over your head and doing a Rip van Winkle. Know that these moments will pass, and even though this will likely mean very little to you in the middle of a crisis-in-a-crisis, say it! Say out loud that these times shall come to an end. Repeat it as many times as it takes to pull yourself through each shaky moment. Then haul yourself up as best you can and keep going, one foot in front of the other, one day at a time.

Once you have made a decision that you shall come through, that you will survive, determination will help pull you through. Even on those days when you feel your weakest, even on those days when you feel like you are just about to give up, like you could not possibly go one other minute more, engage it and let it keep you moving forward. When these shaky phases come, acknowledge them, don't deny them. Acknowledge them, remind yourself why you must get through and call on your support systems to hold you up and walk with you. You can get through these moments of fear or weakness or anger. Use your resources and your grit.

Don't beat yourself up when you fall. Sometimes, the most helpful thing to do is to just lie there for a moment and cry if you feel to. Release is therapeutic and strengthening. Let the pain flow out, then get back up as soon as you can, be as wobbly as you feel, but get back up. Allow yourself to get back up, and having done that, take a moment to rest and recalibrate, and celebrate yourself for having come through that rough patch. Be unrelenting and determined about your survival, but be kind to yourself.

A crisis is a time of intense difficulty or danger. Be careful not to make it any harder on yourself.

Difficulty and danger are not easy things to deal with. You will sometimes, maybe even often, feel like giving up and giving in. Know that that is normal, and remind yourself, continuously, that you have decided that you will get through, that you will not be defeated, that you shall not let yourself down; that you are strong enough and that there is value to your life and your contributions to the people of this world.

Tell this to yourself every time you remember. Always remember. Make it your mantra.

Give yourself a Word!

Words matter. What we say about our circumstances influences how we perceive it and how we act in response. What we say to ourselves affects how we feel and for many people, how we feel guides our behaviour. That ought not always be the case, and especially in a time of crisis, it is vital that we maintain a pragmatic and logical approach, making decision based on conditions rather than on emotions. So it is critical to get the language right. And it would be helpful if we were intentional about finding words that help, that encourage and inspire, that give us courage and strength.

Some spiritual traditions set great store by the power of “the word”. In some of these traditions, there are ceremonies in which devotees and practitioners are given a word – a consecrated, special, unique to them word – that will guide, centre and ground them as they encounter life’s difficulties and challenges, triumphs and successes. They are instructed to repeat and meditate on these words when they are in difficulty and when they are celebrating.

This word, which might be a name, a single word, a phrase or a complete sentence, becomes their personal mantra. It is meant to help them find healing, solace and inspiration. It is intended to help them set themselves aright after a fall and to lighten their load. There is no reason why you cannot employ the same principle for your times of crisis. In fact, there is every reason why you should.

So, make the decision. Make the decision that you will not be defeated by the crisis, that you shall survive and thrive. Meditate or pray on it, whichever is your method of making this kind of connection. Word it however you like, but keep it short so that it is easily repeatable and then vibe on it as needed to help you maintain or regain

your stability and your energy. Allow your words to help you refocus your energies on ensuring your survival and, ultimately, your thriving once the crisis is past. Then get to work on the set of tactics and strategies which you will employ to get you through.

V.

Assess the External Situation

A crisis does not arise without cause. A crisis always follows upon an event. An event devolves into a crisis when the resources necessary for resolving the negative effects of the event are absent or scarce.

Sometimes, at the personal level, it is possible to prevent the event and therefore, also the crisis. Sometimes, we can do nothing to avoid the event, but we can act to avert or lessen the crisis. The actions that will do this are best put in place before the event, but can also, in some situations, be effectively employed after the event has already occurred, and therefore, at the first signs of extraordinary activity.

In some instances, the event is itself the crisis. There is a certain category of event that by its very nature constitutes a crisis. It does not come to an end at which point you are then able to observe damage done and commence recovery. No. It is ongoing and creates a difficult living environment no matter how very highly resourced you might be. The CoVid 19 pandemic was one such. War and social or civic unrest are others.

Like all crises, the event that is war or unrest never just comes about without warning, and the cause is no more preventable by you than an earthquake would be. The major difference, perhaps, lies in the fact that you can see no end to the “event” and that there is no avoiding its consequences, whether you are “involved” or well-resourced or not. That, by itself, is the definition of a dire crisis – you have no

control over any aspect, there is no opportunity to commence your recovery and no way even of ensuring your survival. Every aspect of it is beyond you.

Furthermore, war and social unrest are, by nature, unpredictable. Anything can change in this type of situation and at any random moment. Nothing is certain; nothing is unthinkable. Even civil unrest that begins as peaceful protest can spiral out of control in a flash and present real physical danger for everyone within its scope, for example. In these circumstances, the overarching objective is safety, survival, avoiding injury and death.

It bears repeating: the single most valuable component of any strategy to prevent or confront an event or the potential ensuing crisis, is information. Being informed is critical. It is impossible to overstate or overstress this point. Under normal circumstances it is good to be informed; in crisis situations it becomes lifesavingly critical. Survival in a time of crisis often depends on what you know and when. It is a vitally important aspect of any attempt to circumvent, deal with or exit a crisis.

Whether it is a private or a public crisis, that is to say, whether you're dealing with a crisis in your personal life or one that was generated by forces in nature or in the society at large, forces outside your sphere of influence or control, you must get informed, well informed, highly informed. The first dataset in this category must describe the external environment, the situation outside of yourself. You must know what you're having to deal with so that you can figure out what you must do and whether you possess or can acquire the resources to deal with it.

So, if the triggering event is the loss of employment, for whatever reason, the first things to look at would include but not be limited to, the possibilities and the probabilities of getting a job again, how soon and where, and the extent of your financial reserves to tide you over until then. You will find that either your chances of getting re-employed are good or difficult and you will be in a position to assess your personal finances and see whether you have the resources to weather the storm or not. An assessment that says that you do not have the financial resources and no immediately recognised options for getting them, could cause the event to escalate into a deep personal crisis. In any case, the actions you decide to take must follow from that assessment.

If there is an earthquake or a hurricane that causes a lot of damage to the physical environment in the community where you live, for example, your assessment of the external situation will include the two factors discussed above depending on what work you do and how much damage has been sustained and, therefore, how much time might be required for repair and restoration.

You will have to find out the extent of the damage to your community and how soon recovery might be likely. Look at whether your community is prepared to manage the extent of the disaster, whether it is equipped and resourced, whether it has the financial and technical resources to deal with it and whether it has recourse to support from elsewhere. You will need to look at whether hospitals, schools, churches and shops are open and available, whether the transportation and telecommunications systems are active and other things of that nature.

Then, you will have to assess your ability to sustain yourself in the event that the damage is so bad that the answers to many of those questions is in the negative. Do you have an adequate supply of food, for example? How will you restock? Do you have private transportation? Are you or anyone in your family in need of ongoing medical care? And other matters of that nature.

In the case of an epidemic, every single one of the above must be investigated as well as the risks that you or someone close and dear to you could get infected and die, or recover with all the attendant debilitation, lives forever changed, difficult and new decisions necessary. In cases like this, your primary objective is to avoid infection. Do whatever you find necessary. Do it assiduously and without pause. If your work or other responsibilities put you at greater risk, do whatever you can to reinforce your protections.

If social turmoil or war is the crisis, the single most urgent imperative is your safety. That requires a different quality of information and attention and your options will vary depending on your relationship to the activity.

If, as often happens, for example, the precipitating event is an election or a government decision to which large numbers of citizens have great objection, that objection is often registered through street protests and demonstrations. It might be civilians against government forces or the conflict might be between non-government groups. Sometimes, protests and demonstrations begin peacefully and with the intention to be non-violent, and end up with cities thrashed and people hurt, and intensified military activity.

In any case, the police and other uniformed state entities are always involved, to keep the peace, which can mean anything from observing without an intrusive presence to blocking and corralling the crowds. Sometimes, “keeping the peace” means getting people off the streets by whatever means necessary including intimidation, arrests, violence and the threat of violence to push people inside and backing down. In many of these instances the upshot is violent clashes in which people get injured and sometimes killed.

Often, the authorities will institute curfews and other restrictions on movement, gathering and on communication. In these types of crises, access to food, health care,

schools, work places and community resources, can be affected, so that whether you are protestor or observer, the crisis affects you deeply.

If you are active on any side, or if you are neutral, you will bear the consequences, anyway, and have an equally urgent need to manage your safety carefully.

What is required, then, is time deliberately and purposefully allotted to the investigation of the situation. Read the newspapers, listen to the televised news, watch official press conferences, statements and in-depth interviews from government sources, from scientists in the relevant fields, from artists, academics, professionals, the business community and people in general.

It is often very worthwhile to spend some time researching specific aspects – gather some historical background, investigate some science, look at the medicine, the geography, the geo-politics, explore some personal stories and official accounts of similar situations, and so on.

Pay close attention to the decisions made by the authorities and try to understand the reasoning and the logic behind them. If you're uncertain about something, ask. Write to your leaders, or to the local newspapers, or to an acknowledged authority on the subject.

Look to see which groups within the society seem to be most deeply affected in a negative way, and contrast that information with knowledge of those groups which seem to be least affected or which are recovering most quickly. Try to figure out which group you might be a part of and if you are in the more deeply affected group look for opportunities that could help ease your situation and improve your chances of a strong exit. That often means searching for organisations and community programmes which are responding directly to the event and/or the crisis, and probing their offerings.

Above all, know who your people are. Know who your allies are and the rules for making contact, or alternatively, for avoiding contact, as a particular situation might demand. Understand the instructions about what to do if you are arrested, who to call if you are injured, isolated or in danger, and when and how to lie low or to be front, centre and loud.

Again a reminder: the objective is to remain safe, whole and alive and come out at the end of the crisis in condition to pick up your life and carry on. Wars and clashes with governments have real consequences for people's lives and livelihoods, the quality of life, and the conditions under which people live during and after the unrest or war. It is also the case that your safety and your outcomes might be affected positively or negatively by your position vis-à-vis the crisis, its causes and/or how it plays out.

Sometimes, social unrest and war come when people want a political or social change and in other instances, they occur when the change is initiated by the government or other authorities, such as in a military coup. In these instances, it is virtually impossible to be an impartial observer, because everyone is deeply affected, no matter which side they're on. How to get through it, therefore, how to stay safe, who to call and your risks for danger and harm will differ depending on where you stand. It is vital that you be very clear about all of this.

Sometimes, it is not possible to be a passive, impartial observer in a crisis. Sometimes it is not desirable, either. You must make a decision. Your chances of surviving and having an environment afterwards within which you can thrive, both depend on which choice you make. Whether you will feel shame or regret, pride and fulfilment after the crisis has passed will factor into your ability to thrive then. Your state of mind is an important contributor to your thriving.

There are universal and generally-accepted guidelines for keeping yourself safe if you are engaging in the civil unrest yourself. Primary among these would be that you understand the government position on the matter and the extent to which the government will go to resolve the crisis. Governments are usually not inclined to negotiation and peaceful resolution. The typical state response to civil unrest for any reason is most often authoritarian and very violent. Know this before you engage. Whatever you decide, ensure that your decision is the most deeply informed you could possibly make it and get schooled on how to navigate the potential and probable circumstances.

Then, get a list of the guidelines and learn them so that you know what to do if, for example, the authorities use tear-gas, tasers or pepper spray, rubber bullets or live ammunition on the crowds. Learn how to be active and effective and yet avoid falling into the hands or cells of the uniformed bodies. It might also be very important, no matter where in the world you live, that you also make yourself familiar with some of the methods that state actors employ to punish protestors and to drill information out of those they catch. Mental and physical torture are methods used worldwide, in the most democratic and the most repressive countries alike. If possible, get some training and know your thresholds. Reinforce them as much as you can.

Above all, always keep in mind that often, one of the most effective ways to weather a crisis, and one of the most healing ways, begins with assisting and supporting other people in working their way through. In assessing the situation around you, never neglect to consider the circumstances of other people and the effect of the

crisis on them. Help often comes to us from the most unexpected places and very often comes when we have stepped outside ourselves and are helping someone else.

Of course, as per standard aircraft instructions, put your own oxygen mask on first before attempting to help someone else. Follow any instructions you come to know about that will keep you safe and healthy, then help others be able to do so, too. Sometimes, that is all you can do. Sometimes, that is enough.

VI.

Conduct Personal Inventory

Having completed the assessment of the circumstances facing you externally, the next best step is to conduct a personal inventory, that is to say, assess your personal situation and circumstances.

You must know the extent of your own ability to prevent or withstand the crisis. You must know what is possible for you, what you are able to be, do or have and what you're not. You must know what you are well-provided with and what you will need both at the mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual levels as well as in the physical, exterior, material realms.

This requires that you examine yourself; that you scrutinize your abilities and evaluate capabilities, thoroughly, objectively and without judgment.

The easy piece is the externals, the physical and material realms. While you were doing the assessment of the world around you, you will have also been making determinations about gaps and deficiencies, possibilities and solutions, instinctively and naturally without having deliberately set out to do so. That is the way the human brain works. We often see associations and identify possibilities instinctively, even subconsciously, once we have set ourselves on task in any way.

That is some of what Ralph Waldo Emerson was sharing when he wrote, *“Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen.”*

But this is greater than simply an old saying. There is also psychological evidence that when you are focused on something, your mind works in such a way that you begin to notice it or things related to it, that you had never noticed before, even though they were always right in front of you. It is called confirmation bias and this is one of the instances when it is a positive and helpful phenomenon.

The basic physical assessment you will do is, of course, determining the state of your physical fitness and general health. It is critical and it won't take much. Your ability to respond will depend in part on how healthy and mobile you are and you will already know. You might have been managing a chronic illness, or just emerged from a period of illness. It could be that you have not been sick in ages or that you have been exercising regularly and eating carefully. Or you had not and so on.

The difference here is that you must now assess yourself based on what you expect your response will need to be with respect to the crisis looming or already in progress in your life or in the world around you.

Whatever the event that precedes the crisis, if you have been ill or are managing a chronic illness, you must first establish that your care and progress will not be compromised. Check your medication reserves and find out what you will need to do to replenish them whether immediately or in the near future. Ascertain whether you will be able to see your doctor or continue your rehab or whether you will have to make other arrangements.

If the above does not apply to you, you will still need to determine what the demands will be on your physical plant. If you had been careful of your health and are fit and healthy, your charge will be maintaining your edge and avoiding illness and injury.

If your normal health regimen had not included regular exercise and healthy eating, you will know that you are probably unfit and possibly not as healthy as you could be, and you will need to assess whether you are up to the rigours that will be necessitated by the crisis in which case, you will need to strategise to strengthen yourself. Your ability to withstand mental, emotional and psychological strain, is supported by the state of your physical fitness. Remember, *Mens sano in corpore sana*, as the Romans used to believe. *A healthy mind in a healthy body.*

In the case of a societal crisis brought about by an infectious disease epidemic, avoiding contagion becomes paramount. You want to do everything you possibly can to ensure that you stay well. Immediately you become aware of it, you need to find out how it spreads, where it has already spread to, how it could get into your vicinity, which groups of people are most vulnerable i.e. children, the elderly, or as

in the case of CoVid-19 people with “underlying” conditions, which is to say, people whose health is already compromised. Is it airborne or transmitted through fluids, for example? Can it be spread through touch? What exactly are its symptoms and its short- and long-term effects? How deadly is it, exactly?

Most importantly, get to know as far as that is possible, what are your best chances of avoiding it? How do you protect yourself from contact with it? How do you avoid becoming a carrier yourself? And, what to do should you become infected or suspect that you might be? And, if you know somebody who is, what are your responsibilities?

Listen to the experts – medical professionals and scientists. Do your own reading. Talk to people then think it through and act expeditiously on the information you have acquired. Act on the information as you acquire it. Don't just sit around and wait for instructions. In every instance where an infectious disease is spreading and causing havoc, for example, in every single instance, hygiene and cleanliness will very likely help. Keeping your person and your surroundings clean is a must in every single case. Do whatever cleaning you have to do, as often as you need to, to keep infections away from you. Begin with that, and maintain that stance, assiduously, as aggressively as you need to, while coordinating additional information as it reaches you.

Once you determine either that you are in crisis or at risk of entering, you begin to apply your mental, emotional and psychological strength and if the situation is grim enough or lasts long enough you will begin to tap into your reserves. This is where things could get really difficult. Most people are strong enough to weather any storm or event for a reasonable amount of time. The vast majority of people find it possible to manage frustration, irritation, grief and even danger, for short periods.

If, however, the storm persists, or if the consequences are exacerbated by scarce resources or delayed responses so that the situation devolves into crisis, then the pressure on your mind, emotions and psyche increases and you find yourself having to call on your reserves and dig up some real fortitude on an ongoing basis. Things can get truly difficult at this point.

Life can get tough. Your outlook can begin to feel dim and dismal. When this happens, or to avoid descending into these states, you must be deliberate, objective and purposeful about your mental, emotional and psychological assessment, perhaps even more so than with your physical, for these internal aspects are often much more difficult to manage and to resolve than the physical. And, they can negatively affect your abilities in the physical realm.

Central to this portion of your personal inventory-taking is acknowledging any fears you might have. Acknowledge that you are indeed, worried, concerned or afraid and

try to understand what exactly about and why. This will make it easier for you to address it, or to seek support and recognize help when it shows itself. Potentially helpful opportunities will sometimes not announce themselves; you will have to be alert and aware so as to be able to recognize them.

Keep a constant check on where you are mentally, how you're feeling. The stresses of ongoing crisis can make you sensitive, short-tempered, tearful and emotional. Make time for meditation, journaling, self-care and quality time with loved ones. Be gentle with yourself. Be aware. Be mindful. Be always thinking ahead. Be flexible.

Your response to crisis will need to match the crisis in intensity, at the very least. Your focus will need to be unremitting and razor sharp. You will expend great amounts of energy, physical, emotional, mental, psychological and spiritual, even financial energy, in successfully maneuvering and exiting the time of crisis. A crisis always requires great applications of time, energy and resources of all kinds.

As difficult as it might be to find the time or the opportunity to do so in the middle of a crisis, you absolutely must find the time, the soonest possible, and create the opportunity to check all your resources – relationships, skills, money, etc.

I know. Time to do anything other than respond to urgencies and emergencies just does not ever seem to exist in a time of crisis. You have to keep your eyes on the many fires and on the major fire, stay alive, figure out a way through it all at the same time, all the time. But you must make the time. You will fail if you do not. It is that simple.

VII.

Getting Across The Canyon

The getting through a crisis is somewhat akin to running a marathon or hiking the Grand Canyon rim-to-rim-to-rim. It is in its greatest part, a mind game – and a game that you will win or lose depending upon the quality of your preparation, but also on your mindset, your assessments and your resources – and resourcefulness. And your mindset, in fact, affects how you would have prepared.

Many years ago, when I hiked the Grand Canyon for the first time, I elected to do rim-to-rim-to-rim. I spent months preparing assiduously and seriously. My friends and I hiked and/or ran every trail and mountain in Phoenix and its surroundings, just about, day in and day out for months, and in all kinds of weather. We took step-aerobics and yoga classes, did endurance drills, strength training work, weight work, managed our diets and spent a bundle buying all the requisite equipment and supplies.

We arrived at the South Rim the afternoon before the big day, meandered around the site getting relaxed and acclimated, had the traditional pasta dinner in the Lodge, were in bed before ten p.m. and up bright and early the next morning, backpacks on, hydration taken care of and off in the trolley to the Bright Angel trailhead.

The first nine miles were all downhill, it was cool and beautiful in the four a.m. semi-darkness and when the sun came up, the views were just absolutely spectacular. The

seven miles across the Canyon floor were a breeze. There was beauty all around and we took the time to admire and engage with the environment.



Then, we crossed the Silver Bridge. That got us to the start of the North Kaibab Trail.

“We were psyched and ready. We knew it was going to be a push and we were down for it. Or up. Or whatever. And it all went really very well. At first.

The North Face of the Grand Canyon is steep. It rises on a 15 – 20% grade. By the time we got to it, we had been walking all day and though the sun had not been unkind, and though we were stoked and initially did not notice, the sixteen miles had begun to wear on all of us. We were still making good progress, but we were beginning to feel the toll.

Then, the weather changed. The skies got dark, the canyon got darker and darker. It began to rain – cold, driving, incessant North Rim rain that completely ignored our special REI rain gear. We were very soon, very soaked, through and through, and water was running down the trail around us in a multitude of little rivers and waterfalls. In addition to having to contend with the steep climb and the driving

rain, our boots were very soon filled with cold water and mud and we were slipping and sliding and sloshing and slip-sliding away!

The North Rim that we were trying to get to, is more than eight thousand feet above sea level. It matters to the human breathing apparatus. But, there we were, climbing the steep North Face in cold, driving rain, swashing and slipping in mud, in increasing darkness, and in thinning air and lessening oxygen.

It was brutal. There is no other way to describe it. The Canyon can be quite vicious and pitiless, and this occasion was one of those times. It was a painful two, three, five hours...or whatever. We lost count. We stopped counting time and started counting steps – and breaths. We ached. Feet hurt. Ears hurt. Backs ached. Chests felt fit to burst – or cave in, maybe. The weather did not give us a break! The cold water kept raining down on us. The canyon walls still continued to rise above us. Heads felt light. Toes went numb. Fingers curled and stayed that way. Ears hurt.

Finally, after much stopping and starting, and slipping and sliding, we made it to the top. We made it safely – and proudly – up the North Face of the Grand Canyon and out onto the top of the North Rim.

None of us suffered any physical injuries on the journey, not even leg cramps or serious blisters, but it was severely taxing on our physiques and that had a depressing effect on our minds and our morale, so we were forced to psyche ourselves, talk ourselves through that last piece of the climb, literally.

We got through our climb up the North Face by urging each other on in every possible way, while we also dug deep down into ourselves to find the will to spur ourselves on, silently and out loud.

“Let’s go! Let’s go! Keep going! You can do this! Good job! Breathe! Take a break! Stop for a moment. I’ll rest with you! You got this! No surrender! You can do this!” and the more prosaic and pragmatic, “Can’t have the Rangers coming to get you!!” Those last five or six miles were brutal. Our getting up that cliff was entirely a case of mind over matter.

We hadn’t gone blindly into this. In this case, we had known what to expect. We had gathered all the available information, prepared ourselves physically and mentally, read the personal accounts and spoken with other experienced Canyon hikers and even with a couple of Grand Canyon Park Rangers. We had done our own physical and mental assessments and preparations and had accessed our networks and support systems and yet it was hard. It was a brutal climb. Every year, people die in the Grand Canyon because they had not prepared themselves adequately or were less than careful or were alone and had no support. But because we had done the advance work, however, and because we had each other, we survived to come

through wiser and stronger. We came through proud of our accomplishment and of our newly acquired abilities.

Every period of crisis offers the same kind of outcome opportunity. Despite any pain, grief or despair we might experience, the human spirit and its will to survive and thrive are formidable. We can always come through and come through well. You can get yourself through your crises like a boss. The old Scouts motto, Be prepared, can be the biggest help.

VIII.

Ask the Right Questions

It is important that we establish that surviving a crisis is not limited to the physical – does not mean merely that you come out still breathing. In starkest terms, it does not simply mean that you not die, lose your life, transition into The Great Beyond. It means that at crisis' end, you will be still standing, still holding your own, still with enough resolve and reserves to pick yourself up, rebuild your life, or construct a new one and carry on successfully. To survive a crisis in our terms means that you come out of it with the capacity to continue your life and make it a good one.

Remember that every crisis does eventually come to an end. Odysseus remains the classic illustration. It took Odysseus ten years of trials, tribulations and near deaths to find his way back home. After having already spent ten years spent fighting the Trojan war! But he did eventually land on the soil of his beloved Ithaca and found his wife Penelope, faithful to him, still waiting after all those years.

Hopefully no crisis in your life will require that long to come to resolution. Fortunately, it will not need to if you will dig up the fortitude and courage that live within you, however deep down inside you might think it, and approach your exit from crisis as if it were your life's mission. Because, it might actually be.

The reality is that a crisis can so deplete you that you lose your will to live and your ability to conduct a life. In a crisis, you can lose your job and any prospects of finding another, you could lose loved ones, lose your home and end up living *"sotto il ponte"*

(under the bridge) as the Italians say, and having to depend on the Salvation Army for a warm shower and your Christmas dinner. Some people have completely lost hope in the throes of a crisis. Many people have been altogether overwhelmed and found themselves unable to envision a recovery so they commit suicide; or the mental strain caused them to lose their ability to reason – in streetspeak, they lost their minds and checked out of reality. None of these has to be you.

Losing your mind in a crisis means you have only survived the crisis. You're still alive but you are now merely surviving. Thriving is practically impossible when you're in that condition. So, what else can you do to help you avoid a fate like this? At this point, you, having declared that you will not be defeated by this crisis, and having fully assessed the situation in the world around you and in your internal universe, are ready for the next step in securing your survival. Having ascertained the quality and quantity of your resources you will now collate and categorise this information and settle on the details of your survival strategy.

You take this next step – you start asking questions.

And not just any random questions. You ask the right questions, of the right people. Ask your questions of people who know, who have the information and the authority to give you comprehensive, comprehensible and actionable answers. The goal here is not merely the gathering of intelligence, it is the gathering of actionable intelligence. You are trying to figure out what your options are, what it is that you will need to do to get you through.

You will want answers to questions such as:

What exactly caused this event to become a crisis?

What was missing? What was mishandled?

What action was or was not taken appropriately and in a timely fashion? And by whom?

How bad is it likely to get?

What could make it worse?

What actions could potentially weaken or shorten it?

What failures to act could potentially exacerbate it?

How long is this crisis likely to last?

What will it take to bring it to an end?

Is it possible to put a timeline on it?

Who's responsible for which segments of the recovery?

What can people do to help themselves through?

What can people do to help others through?

What can I do about anything?

What are my options?

What will they require of me and what are the likely outcomes of each of my options?

Ask them once. Then ask them again.

These questions all apply whether the crisis is personal or community-wide. If it is a personal crisis, the answers to the “Who...” questions could very well be “You”. The causes and the answers might all point to you. In that case, some truly deep soul-searching will be necessary and a rigorous and intense application of a super-strong strategy is probably the only thing that will save you and possibly prevent another similar crisis in the future should you somehow manage to get yourself through this one.

If the situation is a more complex one that requires the attentions of the government or some larger body or institution, there will be rather less personal responsibility in some aspects. If a public crisis occasions a private crisis in your life, if for example, state response to the coronavirus brings weeks of quarantine and lockdown, the economy slows to a crawl and you lose your job, but jobs are not available because the economy is stagnant and many companies have closed down, then there is very little you can do, personally, to restart the economy and bring back the jobs, for instance. That puts you in a different spot; perhaps even a weaker spot. But all is not lost. Neither does it necessarily mean that there is nothing at all you can do except sit and wait and hope for the best.

Sit and wait and hope for the best is not usually a viable or encouraging strategy. It is an approach that is not likely to end well for you. At best, you will come out of the crisis situation dependent upon the goodwill, if not the resources, of others. That is never a place of power, and it is very seldom in any way a good place to be.

That is why it is important that you ask these types of questions. When you know, you know. Knowledge is power. The insight you gain will help you see clearly, reassure you or get you all fired up. You could find that things are not as bad as they seem, that the crisis is not as deep and dangerous as you had thought. You might find avenues where you, yourself, might be able to contribute to the resolution of the crisis.

A time of crisis might call up the activist in you. The information you gather, or fail to find, might give you scope and opportunity to challenge a ruling, a law or some unhelpful practice, or perhaps to demand the change of some official policy. It could set you on a brand-new life-path. The life-changing effects of crises are not always negative. Every crisis comes with opportunities. You could find one. If you do, grab it and grow.

In either case, whether you’re dealing with a personal crisis or a public community catastrophe, making the time to seek out the answers gives you something to work with. It gives you a place to start. It allows you to approach the situation with

deliberateness and purpose, with order and focus and with confidence in your own ability to make a way, to make your way through, to survive and eventually come again to thrive.

It is up to you now to filter this information, organize it and decide what you will do with it. It is up to you now to devise a strategy, a plan of action for moving forward, upward and out.

IX.

Settle your Strategy

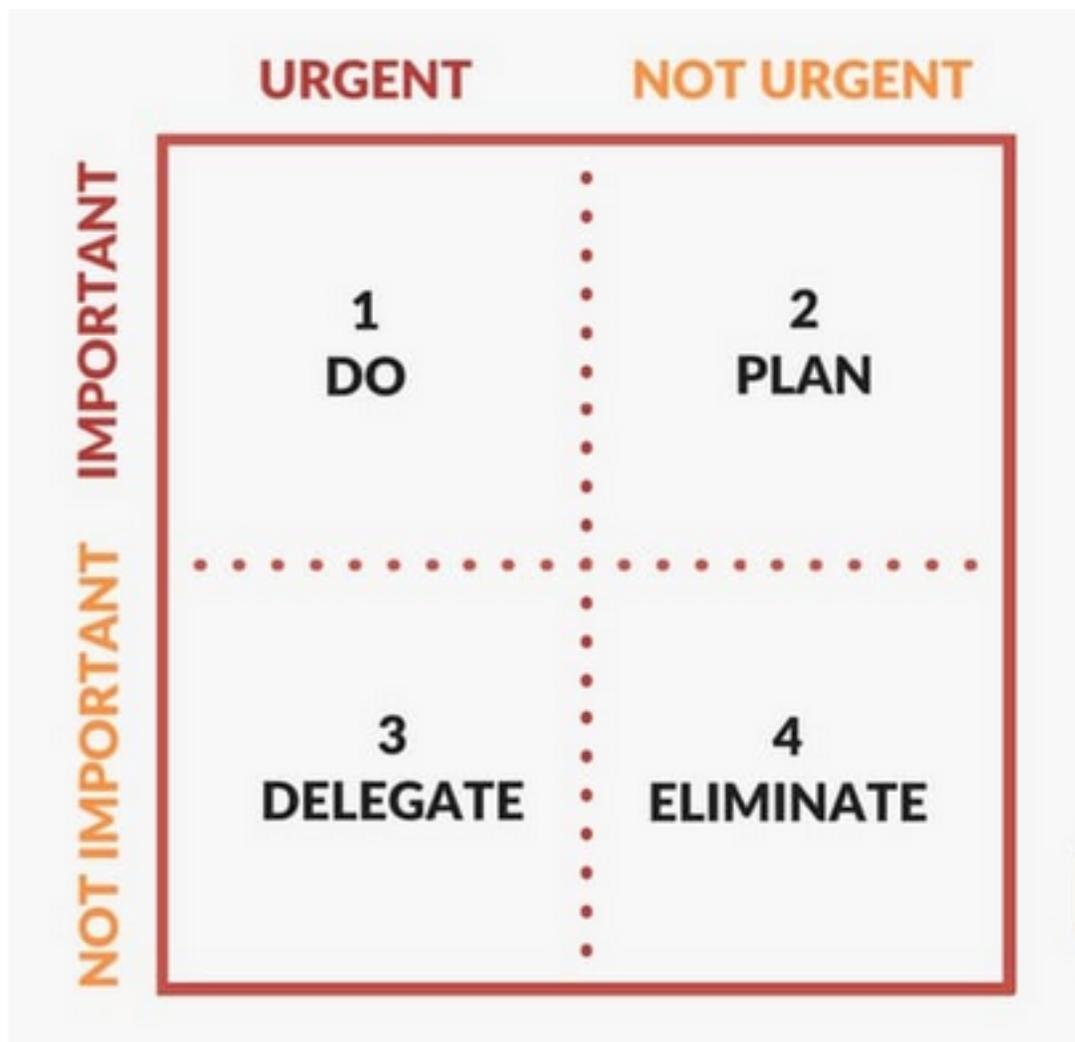
Of course, being able to “sit still and think” is absolutely one of the most difficult things to do in the midst of a crisis. A crisis, by its very nature, keeps us living in that section of the URGENT quadrants of what is known as the Eisenhower Decision Matrix.

In his book “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People”, Stephen Covey created a matrix to help people distinguish between the important and the not important, the urgent and the not urgent and be guided to take actions accordingly.

The matrix consists of a square divided into four quadrants, labelled Urgent/Important, Not Urgent/Important, Urgent/Not Important, and Not Urgent/Not Important. The things we think are required of us will most often fit into one of those and that information ought to guide our decision-making.

Of course, in a crisis, everything is urgent! In a crisis, life can seem to be an unending series of fires that need to be put out immediately, and responding to that feeling can keep us spinning like tops, barely managing to stay a half-step ahead of ultimate disaster, barely managing to keep our heads above water, barely managing to keep ourselves alive in a sense.

It might seem counterintuitive that you be expected to stop putting those fires out even for a moment. It would hardly be considered good advice to be told to stop, look around you and plan ahead, when you can barely see your way through to lunchtime.



But paradoxically, it is precisely when you are in the throes of crisis that it is critical that you do look around you, see where the fires are, try to see where smoke might be signalling that another one is about to flare up and so on. Otherwise, you will keep stumbling around, into one fire after another and then another. Otherwise, you could quite possibly be standing two feet from the exit and not know it, because you have not paused to look around.

You must somehow pause periodically, or better yet, scan continuously and keep surveying your environment. Your survival depends on it.

Once, as I was walking along the beach, I noticed a bird sitting on a rock just a few feet from the shoreline and the breaking waves. I slowed my walk so as not to startle it and have it fly away.

I observed it closely for that moment when it would determine that I was some kind of threat. It was facing the shore and it seemed at first glance to be just resting. It did

not appear to be obviously hunting or looking for anything, but its head kept turning left to right and back again, out to sea and back to land, slowly, unhurriedly, scanning its surroundings like the periscope of a high-tech submarine, staying alert and aware, keeping its eyes on its surroundings so that it would, as early as possible, detect any threat to its little moment of downtime and rest, coming from any direction.

One of the major reasons why crises can have such long-lasting and painful consequences is precisely because people often are unable to properly take stock of their surroundings, scan the environment, think fast – compute – before making that big, important and urgent, decision. This is more critical and urgent during a crisis than at any other time, and yet, most people (and groups of people!) so often fail to do this.

This is reality. This is normal, actually. This is how things generally work. This is the way most people behave during a crisis. In a crisis, everything is or seems to be urgent, and we make decisions on the fly, in a crunch, while we're deep in emotional turmoil. The result is one poorly thought-out decision after another that often compounds the crisis even while, in the moment, they seem to give us a little bit of relief. When that happens, that little room to breathe often is neutralised by the effects of that emotionally-charged and urgently-made decision. The only way to avoid this is to have, and conscientiously apply a strategy.

And that strategy must include pre-crisis training. The reality is that there are some factors that apply to any crisis. Combine that with the reality that in living, we will without a doubt encounter crisis after crisis. Then, include in that calculation what we know about making decisions when we are in emotional turmoil and you will understand the importance of being prepared emotionally, psychologically, mentally – preparing when there is no crisis so that we are not caught flat-footed and vulnerable when one does arise

Having a meditation practice is an easy and reliable way of training yourself in life, generally, and for the vicissitudes of life. One of the benefits of meditation is that it trains you to remain calm and therefore more in command of yourself in a time of crisis, mild or otherwise.

We do eventually get to the end point of a crisis just because all things will resolve themselves in some way over Time, but too often, it turns out that the effects of those emotionally-charged and urgently-made decisions are now added to the pile of the original issues of the crisis itself and they must all be sorted and addressed. The load is made even heavier; the pain, that much greater.

Let's say, for example, that the community crisis is an epidemic. Your government has ordered a city-wide lockdown. No stores are open, no banks or other business places, no schools. Only hospitals and clinics, maybe pharmacies. Public transportation is also stalled. You are a micro-business owner with two employees. Business falls off. There is no clear indication from the authorities about when the city will open up again. They have no idea. It depends on a whole range of things and people. It could take a while.

You're a caring boss. You like your employees. You are optimistic. Initially. Uncertain, but optimistic. You're thinking ahead to the end of the crisis and getting back on track. So, you say, "We'll figure this out. We'll make a way."

Two weeks later, you make arrangements for severance pay. A week after that, your mother contracts the disease. Fortunately, she is not taken severely ill but it adds to your burdens anyway. Your children are at home and must be tended all day, and schooled. Your clients begin to call; they're cancelling orders. Some are demanding refunds. You're feeling anxious, you're physically tired, you get not one moment of quiet personal time because everyone is at home all day every day and requiring your attention.

You run low on money. You run low on food for the family. You venture out to the approved stores at the permitted times and you bring home whatever you can. You have no money left. One of your children gets sick but the paediatrician is not seeing patients and the hospital isn't accepting anything other than dire but not quite death's door emergencies.

How could you possibly be able to stop for a moment and think about next week, even? How could you even think of a plan of action for the coming weeks?! You can't even see your way clear to tomorrow.

Except that you must. Yes. You must.

You must go lock yourself in the bathroom, or wait until everyone else is in bed asleep, or take advantage of the time allotted for exercise excursions and go sit on a bench somewhere, but time you must take. Time to sift through the issues – illness, money, space, work, food...tomorrow.

The standard, well-known, tried and tested approaches apply. You need not come up with anything novel. A piece of paper, a pen and a quiet moment alone. Even if there are other decision makers, it is necessary that you first clarify your thoughts, each of you, before you get together to make the joint decisions.

So, get some paper and a pen and maybe go take a pretend potty break. Sit in the tub or on the counter top – or the toilet seat, for that matter – and consider your situation and the externals as well. List the challenges you're facing in one column.

List the possible solutions and highlight the solutions you would prefer and note anything you already know or possess that might help.

Write the names of the people you could possibly call on, and for what kind of support, specifically.

No decisions necessary at this point.

Make some notes about how you might be able to access and make use of your support system – whom to call first, what you would say, what your contingency options might be. You're still not making any decisions yet. You're merely cataloguing possibilities and investigating opportunities and envisioning possible and probable outcomes.

Remember that the very first decision you made was that you would survive this crisis. Keep that thought always top of mind, even when you struggle to see or to believe. Keep that in mind as you examine your networks and check your connections. It will help you generate ideas and help you recognise and be able to grab opportunities. Opportunities are doorways. They open up pathways. Be open to them.

Once you've made your lists, make a decision that you will make a decision later. There are urgencies that you must still attend to. That's the nature of a crisis but you will likely be feeling lighter and less stressed at this point. Take advantage of that in handling the current urgencies.

Then, later, carve yourself out another little piece of time to prioritise your list. What will very likely be happening in the interim, though, and very happily so, is that new solutions and ideas will pop into your head seemingly out of nowhere, as you go about your business. Jot them down. Make notes. See the possibilities. Then, when you carve out your next escape, you will begin to see a pattern and can start creating your strategy. Write it down and follow it, but be flexible with it.

One of the basic and critical portions of any strategy to survive a crisis must be the care of self. No! Not hair and nails or spa time, necessarily, but time for self. That must be primary in your strategy. Use that time however you wish, but use it for taking care of you. For you, it might be prayer or meditation time. Or ten minutes with a cup of coffee. It could be a moment spent listening to your favourite music, tending to that herb garden on your window sill, or taking a long, hot shower. Whatever it is, do it, and do it as often as you need or can.

Plan your days to the extent that it is meaningful and you are able. Routine can be boring at the best of times, and routine is absolutely vital in the worst of times. Still have a set time to get up in the morning. This is critical. In a crisis, overwhelm can lead to depression and that can make you not want to get out of bed; could make

you wish morning wouldn't come. That is normal, so as long as you keep getting up anyway most mornings, you need not worry about it terribly. Set a time for going to bed at night, too, as far as that might be at all possible.

Your daily activities might have changed, but you would still get great benefit from having a schedule for getting things done. If you're locked in, organize your day as much as possible in the same ways that you would normally have – get the children ready, set them their chores and reading time or whatever, prepare lunches in the morning, do chores in the afternoon, laundry on Thursday evenings, work (at home) still begins at nine a.m. and so on. Again, have a plan but be open to adapting to the exigencies of the crisis.

Know that there can be points of light even in a crisis. For example, instead of lunch with your professional colleagues, you will have lunch with your family – and that is a very good thing.

Your strategy could be as simple as to just take it day by day. Understand that you can simply take life one day at a time, concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other, keeping each day's activities ordered and scheduled. Or you could do one week at a time. The last thing you want in the middle of a crisis is a highly-detailed, complicated strategy. If you are to survive and be in a position ready to thrive, though, you do need to have a get-through-this-crisis strategy. And you must know what indicators will inform you that your crisis has come to an end.

When you're operating like this, you will feel less stressed and be able to respond to emergencies or changes more thoughtfully and appropriately. You will keep despair and desperation at bay. Either of those could drive you to make poor decisions, decisions that, in the moment, could seem like your only options or even like good options, but that could bring consequences that make things worse and prolong your original crisis. Be careful.

Above all, with a simple strategy, you will have less to think about and you will find it easier to see ahead a little bit and to plan for or circumvent approaching events, as necessary or possible. That is what strategy does. It gives you room to breathe. Room to breathe is room to make good decisions. Crises respond best to good decisions.

X.

Get Off the Ropes

When a boxer is “on the ropes” it means that she is being bested by the opponent even if only for a moment. The fact is she has been pushed to the limits. She is slung up, pinned against the boundaries of the ring and is, potentially, in serious trouble. She is having difficulty getting out of that predicament. She is a rope’s width away from being thrown out of the ring altogether, and is possibly very near defeat. The expression translates into everyday living with the same significance. What you experience in a crisis, can certainly be described as being “on the ropes”.

A standard part of basic military training bootcamp everywhere, are exercises called Ropes in some places, and Field Training in others. They involve, quite literally, ropes that trainees are required to master. Single ropes and meshed ropes, ropes that hang singly from poles and as ladders from helicopters, across rivers and on cliff faces; ropes that must be climbed, rappelled on or mastered in some way, individually and in teams. These Ropes courses help recruits develop physical strength, stamina and endurance, and build teamwork and leadership skills. Ropes trains them to think on their feet and make tactical decisions quickly. Field Training prepares them to deal with military action and war, indisputably amongst the highest on any possible scale of crises.

So, your particular crisis has you on the ropes and has also dropped you into bootcamp. Your opponent is invisible, is a circumstance not a person. Your personal ropes course has no trainer you can refer or appeal to. Even if there are people around you, even if they are in the same situation, even if they are helping and

supporting you, crisis is very much a solo situation, an individual experience. Crisis is a lonely place to be and that extreme loneliness is often what causes people to break, to give up, to lie down and die – literally and figuratively speaking.

But that's not you. You had decided that you will survive. You had determined that you will come through. You will bend, you will be bent, you will maybe even double over, or fall to your knees, but you will not break. You will get up off the ropes and you will survive.

Early on, you had taken the time to assess the situation around you. You have identified your opponent. You know what it is and what its strengths and weaknesses are. So, even if now it has pushed you to the limits and onto the ropes, you are still very much in play. You have a strategy. You're not just being knocked hither and yon at the whims and caprices of the crisis.

When you're on the ropes, your opponent is up very close to you. You can hear his breathing; you can smell his sweat. Don't look away now. You are fortified. You have also done your personal inventory. Remind yourself of your strengths and your mission. The ultimate mission is to get out alive. In the right here and now, it is to get back into the centre of the ring and fully into the fight, or to end the match once and for all.

Look your opponent square in the eye. Shield yourself however you can. Take a deep breath. Think quickly. Hit him square in the chest and knock him back. Duck around and come up behind him. Play dead and fall to the ground. Pick your tactic and follow through. Sometimes, you just go with whatever avenue presents itself in the moment.

Now, call up your reserves and act. Scramble. Climb. Swing. Rappel. Whatever. Catch whichever rope you see before you and move out! Every second counts. Every inch you put between you and your opponent is one inch farther away from crisis and closer to survival. If you're carrying a comrade, grab her and move. Don't look back. You don't need to. Keep moving until you can no longer hear your opponent breathing. Find a sheltered place and take a moment to survey your landscape again. Remember! You must always be aware of your surroundings and constantly taking stock of your situation.

This is the fight portion of your crisis response. This is where your Warrior Woman aspect makes her appearance. This is where the battles will be won and lost but bear in mind that one battle won is not necessarily the war won, and more urgently, losing a battle or even a series of battles does not mean you have lost the war. The war ends only when you say so. A crisis cannot defeat you until you allow it to. Nor will it end before you say so.

Think Ngola or Boadicea. Many centuries ago, Ngola took on the Portuguese in Africa and many centuries before that, Boadicea took on the Romans in England. Today, these women are inspirations for many. Monuments have been erected to them. Their lives are taught in history lessons. These women took on their crises using strategy, networks, innate intelligence and determination – the determination to not be defeated. For Boadicea, even death was not defeat.

Ropes courses are intense and difficult, by design. Bootcamp is the definition of severe and even brutal, in any context. Survival in military activity demands full focus and deep discipline. A personal life crisis demands – and deserves – no less. It's get up every day whether you feel like it or not. Put yourself through your paces. Drag yourself through the ropes. Fall asleep exhausted at night only to get up the next morning and do it all again. And again. And again. And again. Until boot camp ends, you're off the ropes and you graduate and can put on your dress whites or blues or whatever and regain command of your life.

Don't limit yourself. You have earned this. You are free to dress whichever colour you choose!!

XI.

Review – Assess – Redirect as Necessary

As you are making your way through the crisis, you will also be making sure to keep a sharp lookout. You will be scanning your surroundings, constantly, keeping an eye out for any new dangers. You will be seeking out any developments, however slight, in the old dangers and catching any changes in the ongoing situation. You will also be checking in regularly with yourself, assessing your emotions, your state of mind, your physical condition, your information, your spirit and all else.

As you do this, you will also be redirecting energies and efforts as necessary. That's what reconnoitering and intelligence-gathering allow you to do – to adapt and modify your strategy, as needed. Sailors are constantly checking the wind and wave action against their ships and sails. Then, they use the information to trim the sails and tack back and forth, port and starboard, hauling or reaching as necessary, in direct response to changes in wave action, wind speed and direction with, foremost in their mind, the location of the port into which they intend to sail, or the storm out of which they intend to safely come.

New information helps you make new decisions, sometimes small ones, sometimes big, difficult ones. Sometimes these decisions will bring the desired outcome, sometimes they won't. You must prepare for either scenario and be open to turning

on a dime, as it were. Sometimes, you will need to do just exactly that. You will have very limited space or time to turnaround, but turn around you must. So, you do.

Your constant reviewing and assessing will help prepare you for any possible scenario. Your intelligence gathering will help guide you to classify issues and potential solutions into appropriate categories – do or not do, being the generic. There will sometimes be: Do immediately! Leave it! Do alone. Get help with this, and so on. Your Eisenhower matrix will prove invaluable in these circumstances.

Life under normal conditions advances upon an inexorable parade of decisions to be made. Life in a time of crisis proceeds in that same unrelenting parade, but intensified exponentially – urgent, insistent, incessant, merciless. The victories sometimes are small, even very small. But they do add up. So, your approach, your response, your application of strategy has to be equally resolute, persistent, indefatigable.

Review, assess, redirect as necessary. Then assess, review, reassess, redirect again. And again. And again. As necessary.

Never take your eye of the goal or the crisis.

XII.

Celebrate your Progresses

Give thanks for small mercies. Acknowledge the little triumphs. Celebrate the tiny victories.

Your reviewing and assessing must not be limited to considering only the things that are threatening you. It must investigate every aspect of the entire landscape. It must include, therefore, feedback from you to yourself – how it is that you managed to make that last step; what you did that worked and what didn't; what line of reasoning guided you to make that decision over another; how you felt while in process and after, and things of that nature.

When you succeed, you must acknowledge that as much as you do when you beat yourself up for having failed. We so easily sulk and mope and perseverate when we fail at something or when things don't go the way we planned, but often we just blow past the successes. In a crisis, we might also feel guilty somehow for having succeeded, because our win might mean that someone lost, or maybe that others are still suffering while we are making progress.

Don't do that. Successes are natural, earned spirit-lifters, and we all need those, especially when times are hard. When you get them, embrace them. Take them in. Allow them to lift you up. Your successes are often inspiration for others.

Celebrations are intentional morale boosters and morale is so easily lost in a time of crisis that it becomes an imperative to celebrate purposefully and specifically. There might not be champagne or food, family and friends to celebrate with, but celebrate you must. As a matter of fact, it is especially when these are missing that you really

must be deliberate and determined about applauding your victories and rejoicing in your triumphs.

Celebration might be a simple whispered, “Thank you”. It might be a long, hot soak. It could be a drive into the country. It could be a couple of hours with a good book or a good friend. It could very simply be you looking at yourself in the mirror and saying, “*I did that. I’m making progress.*” Whatever you choose, act on it. Cheer yourself. Claim your accomplishments. Be your very own fan club and cheerleading squad.

Celebrate every single one of your successes. Observe and applaud every triumph. Steel yourself to keep going. Use celebration to help fortify you to achieve ultimate victory. Know that your crisis is coming to an end, because you are doing the work.

XIII.

Keep Calm and Thrive

No crisis lasts forever. Eventually, every single one comes to an end. The condition in which you find yourself at that point will determine whether and how soon you might get yourself properly back on the road of life and begin to live well and thrive.

The tips and strategies outlined in this book are intended to assist you in arriving at that endpoint on your feet, resolute and strengthened, even if weathered and dishevelled a bit, and ready for Next Phase, the beyond-survival phase, the THRIVING phase.

If you have done the work, if you have been disciplined and resolute, your crisis will seem like an adventure when you look back on it; a tough, sometimes even life-risking adventure, but an adventure that you survived and upon which you can now look back with awe and draw strength from your own stores of resilience and capabilities and personal power. After all, it will have been precisely those that got you through.

And it will be those that will get you thriving once again.

Often, when we come through dark and perilous times we are reluctant to revisit them. We are unwilling to scrape the wounds and stir up the griefs. We are not enthusiastic about re-entering the darkness. That is a totally normal and self-protective reaction.

It is however, one that you must be willing to resist so that you can truly overcome. It is in the looking back that you truly see the gains, and can fully appreciate yourself for having come through. If you resist, and to the extent that you remain uncomfortable with what you felt or did during that time, you will be restricting to the same extent, your ability to truly receive, incorporate and benefit from the lessons brought by the experience. It's not reliving the past, it's not about getting stuck there, but it is taking the power, the lessons, the wisdom gained, consciously, purposefully and strategically.

The crisis journey was a lesson. Your having survived is your certificate, your diploma of matriculation. You have received the lessons and passed the tests. You have grown, expanded, progressed. The information you now possess, the wisdom you have acquired is invaluable and must now be put to use to reinvigorate you and fuel your advance. It is what will drive your thriving.

Look back at your definition of “crisis end” and acknowledge that you have arrived there.

Take off the armour. Lay down your weapons. Wash off the mud, the blood, the salt of sweat and tears. Get out the oils and perfumes. Dress yourself in your victor's robes. Parade around for a bit.

You have survived. You cannot stop there. You must not stop there. Life goes on. You survived to come through because there is more to life for you. You must take the next steps. You must embark on the next phase of the journey. In fact, your having arrived at this point, and in this strengthened condition is indication that you have actually already embarked on the Phase Next, so you really must simply proceed, advance, forge onward to the life that awaits. And thrive.

Know that you have been prepared. You have worked your way through and have readied yourself for this. Life itself is a state of constant battle, but the battlefield is different for you now because you are different now. Your arsenal has expanded. Things that might have been major issues before are now more easily handled and dispatched. Events that might have threatened or even caused crisis before, you now approach with confidence and move through with relative ease. Because, now, you know the rules. And you have a strategy. You have practiced the rules and implemented your strategy and you have come through. You have made your own rules and have proven, and been proven by, them.

The same principles apply after the crisis as during! They work. Apply them.

- Make the decision that you shall thrive.
- Assess the external situation.
- Conduct personal inventory.
- Ask the right questions.

Settle your strategy.
Get off the ropes.
Review, reassess, redirect as necessary.
Celebrate your progress.
CONTINUE to thrive.

Thank You for Reading!

I hope this book has inspired and empowered you to take your personal growth and leadership journey to the next level.

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Thank you for your commitment to improving our world.

With gratitude,

Shirley Osborne

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Shirley Osborne is an internationally recognized advocate for women's leadership. She is a writer and keynote speaker, whose work bridges grassroots empowerment, higher education, and global governance.

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With her unique combination of local insight and global perspective, Shirley inspires women to lead with courage and vision, and without apology.