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"If I Only Had a Brain ..."



Choice Words

Weltschmerz

[VELT-schmairtz]

This German word literally

Greetings!

Last month we talked about how a crisis can steal two-thirds of your brain.

The best description I've found on how to get your brain back comes from Dr. Mark Goulston. He calls this the "Oh F#@& To OK" process. Here's a user's guide to get through it.

-- Lynne

The Search for Intelligent Life -- Inside Your Head!

While every crisis feels different to you, they all go through the same stages.



"Oh F#@&!" Phase

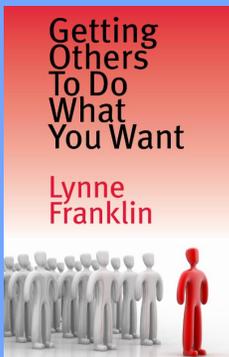
You're in panic mode. What's going through your mind is, "This is a disaster, I'm screwed, what the heck just happened? I can't fix this, it's all over."

How to Get Through It: You're literally in your survival brain, with its three choices of fight, flight or freeze. The first thing you do is ask yourself, "What am I feeling?" Denying your feelings wastes a lot of time and energy -- because you're

translates to "world pain." In its most extreme form, it represents head-clutching despair.

Now that you know the steps for getting your brain back, this is not a place you'll have to inhabit for long!

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trying to convince yourself that what you're feeling isn't true ("I'm *not* afraid!"). That will only keep you stuck in this phase.

Breathe deeply. If you can, close your eyes to limit your outside stimulation. Both will help to calm your mind.

Why This Works: There's a helpful line: "Name it to tame it." Once you're not denying your feeling -- because you've named it -- you start to move into your emotional brain. At least that gets you from three choices (fight, flight or freeze) to five (mad, sad, glad, hurt and afraid).

"Oh God!" Phase

You'd love it if someone would come in and save you from whatever mess you're in. But you realize that isn't going to happen. You're still feeling a little victim-y about it, thinking, "Oh my God, this is a huge mess and I'm going to get stuck with cleaning it up. Why does this stuff always happen to me?"

How to Get Through It: Continue to breathe deeply through your nose. Keep your eyes closed (if you can) to limit some of that information coming through your dilated pupils.

Why This Works: You are pausing to regain your inner balance. Go ahead: feel a bit sorry for yourself! And take this time to calm your body -- with all of those stress hormones rushing through it.

"Oh Jeez" Phase

Now you're thinking, "Alright, I can fix this. But it's not going to be fun."



Combating the "I'll Never Have Another Good Idea Ever Again!" Syndrome

How to Get Through It: Keep breathing. It helps to repeat, "This is scary, but I can deal with it." Here is where you start getting your human brain back.

Why This Works: I view this as the equivalent of a 12-Step program, such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Each action step is preceded by one that *prepares* you. For example, Step #8 is "Made a list of all people we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all." Then #9 is "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." This is where you gather your wits and confidence, which will propel you through the rest of the process.

"Oh Well" Phase

Here is where you start getting your anger to serve you.

How to Get Through It: Now you're ready to be on your own side. Say to yourself, "I will not let this ruin my career, my relationship, my day, my life," my whatever. Follow that with, "Here is what I need to do *right now* to make it better."

The "right now" is important. You can project yourself so far down the future that you miss the present. This can paralyze you. It can make the problem so big that you feel overwhelmed -- not a good choice in this moment! Stick with what you need to get through the next five minutes rather than the next month. There will be time to figure out the other stuff later.

Why It Works: Because you've gone through the other three phases, you now have your human brain back. This means you are physiologically able to start considering what you

can do to limit the damage and make the best of the situation you face.

"OK" Phase

You have reached the point where you can say to yourself, "I'm ready to handle this." And you'll be right.

How to Get Through It: If you've had your eyes closed, you can open them and see more than disaster.

Why It Works: You have allowed your brain to go through all of the stages it needs to recover from amygdala hijack. Plus you have done this without short-shrifting yourself emotionally, which would have happened had you denied your feelings and pretended that you weren't afraid. Or hurt. Or sad. Or angry. (I'm betting that you will never lose your mind because you're so happy!)

Using this process helps you move from being stuck in the way you are convinced the world *should* or *shouldn't be*, but never *will* be, to being ready to deal with the world as it *is*.

Congratulations on getting your brain back!

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