

# THE CORONA EFFECT

*Fighting The Crisis*

*In Your Mind – A Practical Guide*

**GOBRAN®**

***The unthinkable has happened – and suddenly fear and powerlessness are trying to dominate us.***

That's the Corona Effect: An effect that each of us experiences throughout our lives as our reality gets altered from one second to the next. We suddenly find ourselves in a crisis which tries to control our feelings and thoughts, and makes it seem impossible to get through it. We need to withdraw ourselves from the negative power and chaotic thinking that this crisis places on us. We may not be in control of the crisis, but we do have control over how we think, how we approach our challenges, and how we deal with the effects of a crisis.

*This book is a practical guide to re-focusing our thinking. Our mindset changes the way we deal with any challenging situation we find ourselves in, and helps us to win the real battle which takes place in our minds.*

## ***Acknowledgement***

This book was written during an extraordinary time, under extraordinary conditions, and with extraordinary people. It is the result of a team effort that was intense, challenging, sometimes exhausting, but at the same time exemplary. The common goal was the constant, supreme point of focus. It was a complimentary effort – which proved what can be possible if we keep one thing in mind: The importance of community.

This book was created in 16 days (to ensure that it brings timely support during the COVID-19 crisis). However, all of its content is based on 16 years of intensive collaboration with my wife Miriam. Her critical content-related eye, her endurance in drilling down to the core of any topic, and her ability to always ask the right questions and then to jointly find answers, have been a crucial catalyst in our collective work for this book.

The completion of the project was – once again – in the trusted hands of Timo Senger. With his unparalleled dedication and his more than impressive mixture of technical, organizational and content-related skills he was again a central factor for the overall success – from beginning to end, from the idea of the book until its distribution.

Mick Sakkal contributed important ideas to the content and structure of the book; while Stefan König, Daniel Pfeiffer und Kim Sakkal took charge of the graphical design. Efficiency and meticulousity in the research and the copyediting was ensured through Kathrin Beyer and Frauke Markmann. And Christina Süllau and Joshua Duvauchelle translated the German script within less than one week into English. Last but not least, the ideas and capabilities of Bastian Kunkel and Christian Waske enhanced the electronic availability of the book.

## The Corona Effect

My deep appreciation goes to each and every one of them, as well as to the team as a whole. Each crisis brings a lot of hidden things to the surface – but certainly one thing more than anything else: We are highly dependent on other people! Trust, support and appreciation are goods of highest value. I was allowed to experience all of these during the creation of this book – not once, but time and time again. And I am extremely grateful for this wonderful experience.

Michael Gobran

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## ***Fighting The Crisis In Your Mind – A Practical Guide***

*“We are all in a crisis, the size of which I never imagined.”*

These were the words of Lothar Wieler, head of the Robert Koch Institute, on March 20, 2020. Just a few days later, the World Health Organization officially declared that COVID-19, commonly known as the coronavirus, was a global pandemic. Today, we're in a worldwide crisis. The inconceivable has happened and denial is impossible. What does this mean for each and every one of us? What is going to happen now? What will happen next? How long will it last? We all have questions with no direct answers. The effect? A sense of uncertainty and insecurity for all of us, and a level of fear and powerlessness spreading across society on an emotional level.

This is The Corona Effect. To be honest, it's nothing new for the human journey. We all experience fear, uncertainty and worry whenever our reality gets altered unexpectedly. Suddenly, we find ourselves in a crisis that controls our every thought and our every emotion. But it doesn't have to be this way. You don't have to be at the mercy of your perceptions. You don't need to give your mindset over to your emotions of fear and powerlessness. There's a way to shift our approach, change our mindset, and take away the power a crisis has over us. But how?

In a crisis such as the one we're facing today or any other crisis, we unfortunately can't simply choose or control exactly what is happening and how it will turn out in the end. And while we can't control the situation, we CAN control our thinking about the situation. You and I have the power to choose how we deal with a crisis, and the effects we allow it to have on us. Because the real struggle comes down to how we allow the crisis to dominate our thoughts and feelings. It's less about pandemics and crises, and more

about our mind, our mindset, and how we choose to react to the situation. This book has only one purpose: It is your guide, your companion and your support in your battle against The Corona Effect. Think of it as a personal toolkit filled with tools (mental strategies, tips and ideas) to counter the fear and powerlessness we all face in a crisis, no matter how big or small it may be.

In this book, we'll deal primarily with your mindset, your attitude and your composure. We are going to challenge you to rethink your thinking and ask questions like, "Is this thought beneficial?" or "Is this mindset blocking my progress and growth?" We call the latter "thinking traps": Thoughts, mindsets and ideas that trap us in a specific way of thinking about, and approaching, a crisis or problem.

Throughout the next few chapters, we'll explore the ten major thinking traps, and how to improve your mindset to better handle a crisis or problem. Each thinking trap will be examined through self-assessment, exercises and expert guidance. More importantly, the heart of each chapter is what we call your "principle of action." This acts as a guidepost, so to speak, to help you avoid common thinking traps. Ten thinking traps. Ten principles of action. Ten practical applications.

The coronavirus crisis is hardly the first, nor will it be the last crisis we experience. We hope that the next crisis in our lives will not be as globally relevant, but regardless of its scope, we will be better prepared to challenge and stand up against the sensation of fear and powerlessness. This requires focus, practice, and above all, a willingness to deal with ourselves and our thinking. This book will assist in helping you to do exactly that.

*March 2020*

*Chapter 1*

**The Feeling of  
Powerlessness**

*What is Still in My Control  
in Times of Crisis?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I believe that my thinking is an important key to good crisis management.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*In a crisis, I can readily accept that I'm not in control of everything and that external circumstances control me.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*In times of crisis I am more preoccupied with the future than with the current situation.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I believe that struggling with the current situation only makes the crisis more difficult.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

You quickly feel like circumstances are dominating you during a crisis or challenge. This indicates a negative mindset, which is an additional burden on you when trying to overcome a difficult situation.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. My perspective of the future is dominated by fears and worries.
2. Crisis situations give me a sense of helplessness and powerlessness.
3. My responses are overly emotional and often out of place.
4. My lack of confidence triggers a great deal of stress.
5. Every crisis weakens me.
6. The fear and worry of the next crisis determines my everyday life.
7. I try to add more control to my life.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You manage to retain a sense of self-determination even in a crisis. You will be able to get through crises in an easier, healthier manner.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I grant myself healthy confidence even in a crisis situation.
2. I keep a level head even in a crisis situation.
3. I am able to act proactively instead of just react.
4. I don't let myself be easily overwhelmed by stressful situations.
5. Crises don't weaken me in the long run.
6. I see the future with peace and serenity.
7. I accept that I can never fully control my life.

## ***Creator of My Thinking, Not Victim of My Circumstances.***

Crises are more than just challenges. They're dramatic disruptions and bring about abrupt changes in what we're used to expecting in everyday life. This not only creates new situations to which we have to adapt, but it also puts emotional pressure on us and can trigger anxieties about the future. Learning how to deal with a crisis isn't easy, but it's always important. Ultimately, crises are simply the acute climax of a sudden change, and the true effects aren't often felt until afterwards. Dealing with these in a future-oriented manner is a task we have to face early on, and it's a process we have to actively embrace. That's why, whether we're talking about a personal crisis (e.g. a job loss or relationship breakdown) or an international pandemic, it's crucial that we focus not just on the present pressing needs, but also on the bigger picture and overcoming the crisis. After all, the crisis affects our present moment, but our future is determined by how we respond to it. We need to design our "tomorrow" so that this bigger, holistic mindset can provide us with a balanced perspective and give us something to strive towards.

Of course, unlike Pippi Longstocking, we can't change the world to be exactly the way we wish it to be. We're humans, after all, and not magical superheroes. While we like to think we're self-determining and independent, no amount of wishful thinking will change the reality around us. Instead, in a crisis, we experience how heteronomous (i.e. how we're influenced by the world and circumstance around us) we actually are. The more severe the crisis, the more we can feel overwhelmed by our sense of losing control and being at the mercy of our circumstances. There are many examples that you might have already experienced in your life: A serious illness which leaves us unable to work, the sudden loss of a job due to changes in our industry, a severe economic recession or a global disease pandemic like COVID-19.

But no matter what the cause and the exact extent of our personal crisis, in the end all crises have one thing in common: They give us a clear indication of our transience and our limitations as human beings. If we're willing to keep the right perspective, this experience can also provide clarity and a humble awareness of our TRUE power and abilities: What we can create ourselves, what we can control or influence on our own, and also what lies outside of our influence and control. Such an honest look at our limitations can be frustrating, but it's also very liberating. Instead of being preoccupied with things beyond our control, we can focus all our energy on what we are actually able to create, change and influence. And in every crisis - no matter how large it may be - we always have one factor entirely in our control: Our mindset and our way of thinking. We can't change the crisis. But we can change our inner attitude about it. Your mindset is the central key to successful crisis management. If we have a fatalistic perspective that there's no hope, this negative mindset is going to determine our approach to the crisis and affect every choice and decision we make. The opposite is also true. If we keep a positive, hopeful perspective, we're better empowered to think outside the box, come up with creative solutions, and see new ways of approaching a dilemma. In both scenarios, our inner attitude has enormous power to push or pull us in a different direction. How we approach a crisis determines our success or failure in overcoming it. As Henry Ford said, *"Whether you believe you can do it or whether you believe you can't, in either case you will be right."* How you think changes how you act. If your attitude is, *"This makes no sense and is hopeless,"* you'll carry out different behavior than if you have the personal conviction that says, *"Something good can come out of everything."* We're not talking about what's right or wrong, or ignoring the very real problems in a crisis, but rather about understanding fact versus perception, and the power perception has in how we face the facts. In your battle against feeling powerless, this simple reminder will help: You can be the **creator of your thinking, not the victim of your circumstances.**

## ***Three Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: Use Confidence as an Antidote to Fear**

Fear is a natural response to a crisis. No one is immune to fear, no matter how naturally optimistic we might be. But too many of us allow fear to spread unchecked, and we let fear rule our every thought. This is neither realistic, healthy or helpful. Ignoring fear is just as damaging as exaggerating your existing fears. Instead, it's important to take an honest look at our fear and answer a question: What are the true facts and what is your mind's projection? Many of our fears are actually our mind's projections, or our attempts at forecasting the future. We might take the facts of today and extrapolate them into the future, but the moment we do that, we're no longer dealing with facts or truths. We're imagining what might happen, and assuming we know what the future holds. Yet, there are no guarantees for the future. Recognizing this is relevant, because we are here on the level of "faith." If the future isn't "knowable," then it's only "believable." And what do you choose to believe about your future?

This gives us a chance to use confidence as an antidote to fear. Both confidence and fear are manifestations of faith. We're confident when we assume things will proceed positively, and we're fearful if we assume that things will continue negatively. Neither fear nor confidence are based on knowledge or facts, but on an imagined prognosis of the future. The sooner we accept this, the easier it is for us to intervene into our thinking. After all, if both confidence and fear are only projections (i.e. assumptions of the future), then we can change our projections by changing our minds. The question is, what would you prefer: Living with a negative projection or a positive one?

**Tip 2: Stress Resilience: Be a Palm Tree, Not an Oak Tree**

Resilience describes highly elastic materials that bend under pressure and then bounce back to their original state. This ability is particularly important for us when dealing with stress in a crisis. It's only when we invest in being resilient that we're able to return to normality after a crisis. The essential factor here is giving yourself the inner permission to react to crises not with strength, but with adaptability. A good mental image of this is the comparison between an oak tree and a palm tree in a storm. An oak tree tries to resist the storm standing proud, steady and strong, while a palm tree bends and flexes in the wind and rain. If the storm grows too strong, the outcome is obvious: Despite its strength, the oak tree refuses to bend and eventually breaks, while the palm tree sways with the storm, adapts to the changing winds, and will eventually return to its original state when the sun rises the next day.

**Tip 3: Accept, But Don't Give Up**

A special characteristic of stress-resilient people is the ability to accept things we cannot change. This sounds easy, but it's very challenging to accomplish. When you refuse to accept what's happening around you, you invest all your time and energy into trying to control uncontrollable circumstances or pushing against immovable obstacles. However, no amount of striving, hard work or pushing forward against those kinds of obstacles will have a positive effect on your future. If anything, it just drains energy and strength. Acceptance doesn't mean giving up. Resignation and giving up is characterized by the attitude, "*It doesn't matter anyway.*" Acceptance, on the other hand, is characterized by a realistic recognition of the underlying conditions. This is the only way we can maintain our focus and confidence for the future, even in a crisis.

## ***Four Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Expecting to Be the "Designer of My Life"**

You're the creator and designer of your thoughts, your mindset, and your reactions to a situation. That's very different from being the designer of your life. This is a subtle, but significant, difference. All of us are able to determine our own thinking in every situation (even if it's very difficult in some cases), but this isn't always the case with our circumstances. Especially in a crisis, the extent of heteronomy is particularly great. So, if we have the expectation that we can control or change our circumstances at all times, we'll fail in our journey and experience defeat and discouragement. Instead, focus on the one thing that you're actually able to control and shift: Your thoughts and your mindset.

### **Trap 2: Listening Too Much to Negative People**

Getting support from your family, friends and community is very important in a crisis, but you must be aware of whether the people around you are contributing positive or negative energy to your efforts. A popular quote says that *"bad company corrupts good character."* Meanwhile, psychologists say that we're the sum of the people we hang out with. Negative people can have severe and significant impacts on our mindset and our thoughts. But this also works with positive friends and family. If the people around you are supportive, encouraging and embrace a positive mindset in the face of big challenges, they'll similarly have a positive effect on your mindset. Be aware of how those around you impact your thoughts, your reactions and your levels of confidence and optimism. Invest in surrounding yourself with people who encourage you to be your best self.

### **Trap 3: Predicting the Future**

Your life journey isn't a math equation or a scientific experiment. We can't determine the result in advance, like knowing one plus one equals two. Life is simply too unpredictable and always in flux, especially in a crisis. If you acknowledge this, you can use it to your advantage. Don't get into the "If X happens, then Y" trap, which is a causal projection into the future (e.g. X leads to Y). Remind yourself of the unpredictability of life, and work on being flexible in your responses instead of holding on to some preconceived notion of what life must look like.

### **Trap 4: Focusing Too Much on News, Politics and Social Media**

By the time news and information reaches you, it's likely been edited, changed and filtered through numerous perspectives. In fact, a lot of the news you read these days about global pandemics and local crises is edited to provoke clicks, views and audience reactions. This is why much of what you see in the news or social media is focused on problems and exaggerated calamity, and not necessarily on solutions, hope or good news. If we spend too much time and energy focusing on current issues and predominantly "bad" news, our negative perception of the crisis will understandably be reinforced and feed our personal fear and sense of desperation. For effective crisis management, we should pay particular attention to how we "feed" our thinking. If we constantly deal with negative news about the crisis, they will ultimately have a crucial negative influence on our thinking.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **Isn't Optimism Nothing But Sugarcoating Reality?**

True optimism doesn't focus on the present, but always on the future. This is an important distinction, since the current situation in a crisis is of course heavily affected by negative incidents, facts and experiences. "Sugarcoating" is when you look at the present, negative moment, and ignore what's going on by depicting it as more positive than it actually is. For instance, telling a mother of a toddler with a serious illness that "*your toddler is fine*" would be an irresponsible sugarcoating of the situation. In contrast, true optimism doesn't focus on the past or present, but exclusively on the future. It is the inner conviction that something positive can develop from all that is going on. Of course, optimism simultaneously accepts that there isn't any type of guarantee (nor that it's guaranteed to be "bad," either!). True optimism, so to speak, is the hope for a new day even if the night is particularly dark and unpleasant.

### **Aren't Optimists Ultimately Naive?**

You could say that optimists are naïve, but so are also so-called "realists." Anytime we're trying to predict the future, we're stepping into a moment of faith. Neither the optimist, nor the pessimist, nor the realist have a reliable forecast of what the future will bring. What they all have in common is that they're ultimately only making assumptions, probabilities and projections for the future, each based on their personal convictions, their current level of knowledge and their human limitations. It's therefore helpful to expand this question a little: How does a pessimistic view of the future help you? Because if, in the end, all perspectives of the future offer no guarantees, then it's worth examining the impact that each mindset

or attitude can have on us and deciding which option serves us best in a crisis. Looking optimistically into the future always improves our chances, and helps us solve problems more efficiently than looking pessimistically at a challenge or circumstance.

### **What Can Be Done if an End to a Crisis Isn't Imminent?**

In a very long, difficult situation of my life where I was about to give up, a good friend asked me a question: "*If you knew it would take one more day to get through this, would you give up today?*" My answer was "No!" The next question immediately followed: "*What if it was a week?*" Again, I answered, "*No, if it was just one more week, I wouldn't give up.*" My friend persisted and extended the time frame again: "*And if it was a month?*" After giving it some thought I came to the conclusion that I wouldn't give up. More important than each of my answers was the effect my friend's questions had on me.

In this lengthy crisis, the concept of time suddenly became my helper and not my opponent. In many cases, a crisis can drag on for an incalculable period of time. We often feel that we can't go on, or can't keep doing whatever we're doing. We might be tempted to give up or give in. If you're facing a crisis or challenge that seems like it has no end in sight, don't focus on the idea that you're facing months or years of it. Think about breaking down a challenge into more manageable, specific time frames. You can always tell yourself, "*I'll deal with this for the next hour*" or "*I can come back to this challenge next week.*" Maintaining a healthy concept of time better empowers you to do what you can, when you can, with what you can.

## Your Workbook (Part 1/10)

### ***Creator of My Thinking, Not Victim of My Circumstances.***

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):  
***How well do I live this principle of action?***

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

***To what do I attribute this?***

*“Crisis is a productive situation.  
You just have to get rid of the flavor of disaster.”*  
– Max Frisch

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- Use Confidence as an Antidote to Fear
- Stress Resilience: Be a Palm Tree, Not an Oak Tree
- Accept, But Don't Give Up

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Expecting to Be the "Designer of My Life"
- Listening Too Much to Negative People
- Predicting the Future
- Focusing Too Much on News, Politics and Social Media

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- Isn't Optimism Nothing But Sugarcoating Reality?
- Aren't Optimists Ultimately Naive?
- What Can Be Done if an End to a Crisis Isn't Imminent?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***  
*("Creator of my thinking, not victim of my circumstances").*

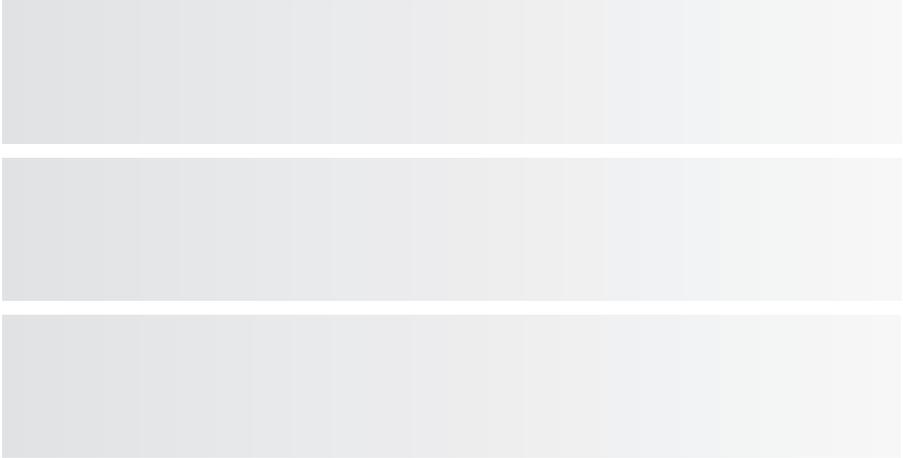
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I grant myself healthy confidence even in a crisis situation.
- I keep a level head even in a crisis situation.
- I am able to act proactively instead of just react.
- I don't let myself be easily overwhelmed by stressful situations.
- Crises don't weaken me in the long run.
- I see the future with peace and serenity.
- I accept that I can never fully control my life.

*"There are only two days a year when there's nothing you can do:  
One is yesterday and the other tomorrow."*

– Dalai Lama

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy when implementing the principle of action.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three biggest challenges in implementing the principle of action.

***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (Creator of My Thinking, Not Victim of My Circumstances.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"Determination in adversity is always half the road to rescue."*

– Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

*Chapter 2*

**Forgetting Our  
Strengths**

*How Do I Deal with the Sense  
of Being Overwhelmed in a Crisis?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I truly know my strengths (which can also help me in a crisis).*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I always focus on my strengths during a crisis and use them intentionally.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I intentionally discover new strengths, especially in a crisis.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I deliberately don't focus on my weaknesses.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

You're losing your focus during a crisis. This amplifies the sense of being overwhelmed.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. The sense of being overwhelmed is stronger than the magnitude of the crisis.
2. I am unable to see any strengths that I could put to good use right now.
3. I only focus on what's missing, not what's still there.
4. I am unable to really activate my strengths.
5. I only consider my strengths in general and not situational.
6. I focus on weaknesses, which weakens my self-confidence.
7. I focus on the impossible rather than the possible.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You consciously perceive your strengths and you don't let the feeling of being overwhelmed dominate you.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I focus more on my resources than on the crisis.
2. I appreciate my strengths, especially now.
3. I am purposefully utilizing my strengths.
4. The crisis has helped me recognize new strengths.
5. I am not overwhelmed, only challenged.
6. I strengthen my self-confidence by being aware of my strengths.
7. I focus on the possible instead of the impossible.

## ***Gaining Strength Begins with Recognizing Strengths.***

In order for your GPS app to guide you to your destination, it first has to identify exactly where you are right now. Without knowing your current position, your GPS can't give you correct guidance for reaching your destination. Crisis management is no different. When we're navigating (pun intended) a crisis or challenge, we must first gain honest clarity about our starting position before we take steps to get out of the crisis. A SWOT analysis is one of the simplest and most effective instruments for assessing a current crisis or challenging situation, whether as an individual, team or even entire organizations. SWOT stands for **s**trengths, **w**eaknesses, **o**pportunities and **t**hreats. The SWOT analysis starts with a focus on your strengths – and that for a good reason. Throughout life, but especially in a crisis or difficult situation, we tend to easily focus on our perceived weaknesses or anything negative in the situation.

This perception however would leave out one central factor for successful crisis management: Your strengths and what you can actually do in a difficult situation. And how are we supposed to develop the necessary strength for navigating a crisis if we aren't aware of our strengths? Therefore, let's start right here and define a useful process for analyzing and appreciating your strengths. First, we need to clarify what is really meant by "strengths", because they don't relate exclusively to our abilities or talents. Such a definition would be far too narrow. Rather, strengths are any and ALL of the resources that we can use profitably with regard to a specific task, challenge or objective. This could be your expertise, experiences and observations, or your network, your special connections, your financial resources and more. Don't take an overly restrictive or limiting approach to your strengths. Instead, try to view your strengths in

the most comprehensive way by letting your eyes gaze as far as possible. Brainstorm, collect ideas, search for your skills and experiences, and keep an open mind.

However, it's crucial that we always keep the current context clearly in mind when looking at our strengths. We shouldn't look for strengths simply across the board, but rather for those that could actually benefit us in our current situation. After all, strengths are only the right tool to tap into when they have a clear connection to whatever is currently affecting us. What's the use of being the world's strongest bodybuilder if you're trying to thread a sewing needle? Threading a needle requires a steady hand, a good eye, and patience. While being strong is a strength in its truest sense, threading a needle doesn't require the brawn and muscle of a weightlifter. You need a whole different skillset. If you have a clear view of the current context or crisis, the search for your strengths can and should be as extensive as possible.

This is THE crucial first step in crisis management. Instead of focusing on the discouraging negatives or impossibilities (and there can be many in a crisis), you're empowered to look at all the great possibilities. Seeing hope and opportunity, instead of the overwhelming burden, is essential for an impact-oriented mindset. After all, it's ultimately about making the best of our possibilities (and not of our impossibilities). And this is why it's so important to have a good inventory of our strengths, which determine the scope of our possibilities. On this foundation we can successfully build our crisis management, and the stronger our foundation, the easier it is to build the structure of our mindset "house." To prevent us from forgetting our own strengths, the following principle applies: **Gaining strength begins with recognizing strengths.**

## ***Three Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: You Must Really Want to See Your Own Strengths**

In German culture, we love to focus on our weaknesses. In part, that's because we strive for perfection. Therefore, it's easy for us to look at all that's still missing in our lives. For example, even when 99.8 percent runs perfectly, our focus quickly shifts to the 0.2 percent that's still going wrong. This approach sometimes brings benefits, since it continuously asks us to optimize the quality of our products and processes. The great disadvantage, however, is that it makes it easy to overlook what is working well. We can see our weaknesses clearly, but can sometimes overlook our strengths. This creates a biased assessment of our initial situation, so we'll need to take deliberate countermeasures. And the only effective way to do this is to WANT to see our own strengths. This may seem like an odd tip, but it's a prerequisite for successful crisis management. Do you truly desire to understand, accept and embrace your skills, passions, competencies and experiences?

We need to systematically look for and cultivate our strengths through selective perception, an approach where what we focus on rises in our awareness and becomes more present in our lives. For example, psychologists report that if we love a certain car color, we tend to notice more of them on the road or in the parking lot. If we focus on the snoring guy next to us on the airplane, the snoring seems louder and louder from second to second.

And If we focus on our strengths, we suddenly discover more strengths than we might have thought we had before. However, this starts with our desire: Are you truly wanting to spot and expand your strengths?

**Tip 2: Write Down Your Strengths AND Describe Their Benefits**

Writing down lists can help you process your thoughts and solidify your resolve. It gives us a more conscious, tangible approach to our strengths. Write down a list of your strengths and describe the benefits of each strength: Where did this strength help me in the past? How can this strength be of help in overcoming the current crisis?

This approach is all about activating specific mental resources. In times of crisis, we naturally experience major limitations which mainly affect the resources available to us. When we focus on what we have (which of course includes our strengths), we can better see the resources we have on hand and can make the best possible use of them.

**Tip 3: Let the Crisis Help to Boost Your Strengths**

Resistance is an important factor for personal growth and development. It's not unlike working out in the gym: The heavier and harder your workout, the more you build your muscular strength and endurance.

The brain is also a muscle! A difficult situation or a crisis can challenge us and enable further growth and mental strength. We can use the difficulties and obstacles we are facing in a crisis as an opportunity to keep on building our strengths. Similar to lifting weights in the gym, you simply need to recognize your strengths and consciously use them (exercise them!). The term "consciously" is important, because it helps us to work on our inner attitude, which is the maximum amplifier for our strengths.

## ***Four Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Devaluing a Strength by Taking it for Granted**

It can be difficult to consciously look at our personal strengths because it's so easy for us. If we're strong in a particular skill or situation or career, we can often achieve success relatively easy. This experience very quickly leads to devaluing the particular achievement and the strength involved. *"Anyone can do that, it wasn't anything special,"* you might tell a friend. *"That was nothing, it was easy,"* you might tell yourself. etc.

By doing this, we're actually taking away the significance of our own strengths. And if we take our strengths for granted, we then start to value our strengths and accomplishments less and less, and can become blind to these strengths when we need them most: In the midst of a crisis or challenge.

### **Trap 2: Comparing Your Strengths with Other People's Strengths**

Every single one of us are as unique as our individual fingerprints. Likewise, our strengths, talents and experiences are as unique as our own individual identities. Embracing our uniqueness is especially important when it comes to crisis management. It's not about what you have more of or less of than others, or how someone else's skills and strengths stack up against yours. Instead, it's exclusively about how YOUR unique strengths help you in YOUR unique crisis management. Comparing yourself to others and how they're handling a challenging situation will just lead to dangerous pride, or discouraging frustration, neither of which allow you to use your strengths in a proactive, positive way.

### **Trap 3: Fearing Overconfidence**

This is a classic reason why we aren't too keen to look at our strengths. There's an odd tension between embracing our strengths and staying humble, and we often fear overconfidence because we overvalue a false sense of being humble.

If we see and accept our faults, it's often deemed acceptable. In contrast, it's often deemed socially unacceptable to celebrate our strengths and what we're good at because it can seem boastful or prideful.

When it comes to navigating a crisis, we should be able to boldly name our weaknesses as well as our strengths. It's about a healthy, holistic and balanced view of ourselves and not exaggerating either extremes. Both our weaknesses and our strengths are part of our lives and therefore important factors in our ability to handle a challenge.

### **Trap 4: Using Perfectionism as a Benchmark**

The focus on personal strengths is only possible if we set aside any claim to perfectionism.

Strengths are the things we're better at, exclusively compared within ourselves. Neither comparison with others nor with an unattainable standard of perfection will help. It's about making an inventory of our own abilities and resources, which we then prioritize. The aspects listed on the top of the list are obviously our strengths.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **What is our most important strength in a crisis?**

Our mindset and an impact-oriented approach to our thinking is the key to successful crisis management. Our thinking determines our actions and this in turn determines our impact. Consequently, our mindset plays a decisive role in our success or in our failure. How much our inner attitude influences all our other strengths is regularly seen in sports. For example, most German Bundesliga soccer teams that suddenly find themselves in the relegation battle do not lack talent, skills or potential, per se. Rather, it's the players' minds that matters here. Television commentators often describe this with phrases such as, "*The mind isn't free,*" or, "*The issue is the mentality,*" etc.

Of course, these are just spontaneous comments, but they're based on a fundamental insight: Our thinking is crucial to our performance, whether it's in sports or in life in general. With the appropriate attitude we can ultimately turn our resources into strengths. And consequently, the most important strength we need for successfully overcoming the crisis is a mindset in which we WANT to make the most of our possibilities.

### **Aren't weaknesses sometimes also strengths?**

Absolutely. That is why we don't take a blanket approach in the search for our strengths, but always in relation to the current context (i.e. the crisis in which we find ourselves). While we're in a certain situation, something might be an obvious weakness because it doesn't bring any benefit to that specific challenge, even if it can be a much-needed and therefore helpful strength in a different situation.

Thus, when assessing our strengths, we always aim to differentiate and never generalize. This is why it's also important not to complete the first step of crisis management too quickly and assume we already know everything we need to know about our strengths. Instead, we should approach it with an open mind and let the new situation help us to identify "new" strengths.

### **How many strengths should I have?**

There is no general answer to this question. To successfully overcome a crisis, it's not about the quantity of your strengths, but how consciously you handle them and apply them to your challenges. This starts with an active search and ends with a purposeful application. The more consciously you do this, the more your inner attitude towards yourself and your strengths benefit from it. Accordingly, your view of the crisis will grow more positive and hopeful – not because the crisis will become smaller and less significant, but because you will build up more confidence for successfully handling the crisis.

### **How can I utilize previous successes as strengths?**

Typically, the past is only good for two things: Remembering pleasant experiences and learning from the past experiences for the future. We can use both aspects specifically for crisis management to encourage us when faced with difficult situations. It's important to deliberately remember past successes, then transfer them to the current situation. The following question will help: "*What can I learn from past successes for my current situation?*"

## Your Workbook (Part 2/10)

### *Gaining Strength Begins with Recognizing Strengths.*

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):  
*How well do I live this principle of action?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

*To what do I attribute this?*

*“Strength does not come from physical capacity  
but from indomitable will.”*

– Mahatma Gandhi

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- You Must Really Want to See Your Own Strengths
- Write Down Your Strengths AND Describe Their Benefits
- Let the Crisis Help to Boost Your Strengths

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Devaluing a Strength by Taking it for Granted
- Comparing Your Strengths with Other People's Strengths
- Fearing Overconfidence
- Using Perfectionism as a Benchmark

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- What is our most important strength in a crisis?
- Aren't weaknesses sometimes also strengths?
- How many strengths should I have?
- How can I utilize previous successes as strengths?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***

*(Gaining Strength Begins with Recognizing Strengths).*

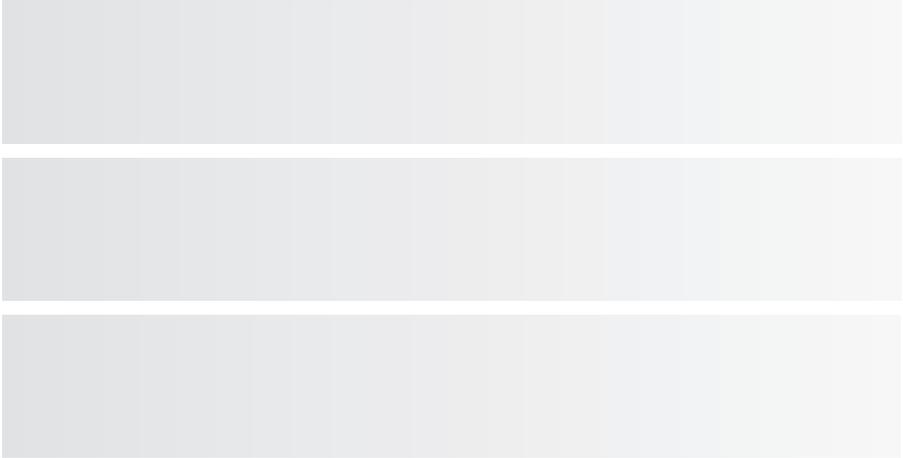
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I focus more on my resources than on the crisis.
- I appreciate my strengths, especially now.
- I am purposefully utilizing my strengths.
- The crisis has helped me recognize new strengths.
- I am not overwhelmed, only challenged.
- I strengthen my self-confidence by being aware of my strengths.
- I focus on the possible instead of the impossible.

*"Before anything else, preparation is the key to success."*

– Alexander Graham Bell

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal gray bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy when implementing the principle of action.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal gray bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three biggest challenges in implementing the principle of action.

***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (Gaining Strength Begins with Recognizing Strengths.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"Better light a candle than curse the darkness."*

– Confucius

*Chapter 3*

**The Need to be  
Autonomous**

*Why is it so Hard for Me  
to Accept Help?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I know all my weaknesses and I'm aware of my limitations.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I actively and specifically ask for help when I need support.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I can easily accept help without feeling obliged to give anything in return.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I truly believe that my environment can always offer me help.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

Your feeling of helplessness will increase if you don't try to be aware of your weaknesses (or if you reject support from others).

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. I am overtaxing myself and will ultimately fail in my self-expectations.
2. I don't see the potential my environment could offer.
3. I don't experience any relief.
4. I decline support out of a fear of commitment.
5. I perceive strength in managing things alone, and this will become a major weakness.
6. I hinder valuable support.
7. I feel alone and helpless.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You recognize your weaknesses and limitations and get the necessary support, which is especially helpful in a crisis.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I honestly and openly deal with my weaknesses and limitations, even in crisis situations.
2. I receive valuable support from my environment.
3. I feel relief.
4. I experience a sense of community.
5. I don't feel that I constantly have to publicly display a strong persona.
6. I have a chance of regaining strength in weakness.
7. I am not path-blocking, but goal-oriented.

## ***Managing Weaknesses Means Asking for Help.***

It doesn't matter how many talents, abilities and positive attributes we may have. There are still many things we can't do or can't do well. This is part of our human fallibility, and even the greatest quest for perfection can't change this. Therefore, in normal life but especially in a crisis, it's important to take an honest look at our weaknesses. The goal of this honest self-inspection isn't that we want to eliminate our respective weaknesses, but instead, manage them in a way that helps us overcome our challenges.

What exactly does this mean? A weakness is anything that we can't fix, eliminate or solve ourselves. We don't have to give up and accept this weakness as our full reality, but we can create a plan to intentionally tackle it. This may mean using new tools, or asking for support from others.

Managing weaknesses can be broken down into three major areas: First, identify your weaknesses. Second, actively seek help. And finally, accept help. Depending on our personality and character, there are four reasons why we may find it a bit difficult to implement these three simple aspects of good weakness management.

**Reason 1: Our pride.** If we get help from others, those who are helping us will appear greater or stronger in the moment. Likewise, by needing help, we may feel smaller or weaker in the moment. This can hurt our sense of pride, and may cause us to prefer trying it on our own rather than asking for help.

**Reason 2: Fear of "hidden contracts."** Sometimes, there are hidden strings attached to the help or support we need. For instance, we might feel

we owe a lot to a friend who helped us pack and move, and we feel we must return the favor in some way – even though they never mentioned anything about this. The truth is, in many cases, people WANT to help us during a crisis or challenge, and there are no ulterior motives or strings attached to their support.

**Reason 3: Striving for independence.** Many of us fear being too dependent on others. Accepting help can trigger the feeling of becoming dependent, since we obviously cannot cope with the situation alone. Interestingly enough, this approach takes us out of the frying pan and into the fire. Because the greatest dependency is ultimately the dependency on independence. If we MUST be independent, we are each a prisoner of this very need. The consequence? We miss the chance to receive help that could change our lives.

**Reason 4: Obstructive convictions.** All of us have past experiences that define us. From our past, we have derived basic assumptions – some of them are helpful, and some obstructive. For example, if we have internalized the assumption that "help is a sign of weakness or incompetence," that will naturally have an effect on how we deal with asking for and receiving help. Even if we realize that we need help, we would still be faced with an inner hurdle which we may find difficult to overcome.

Regardless of which of the above reasons resonate with you the most, we all need help. And it is precisely when we're in a crisis that our limitations, weaknesses and blind spots become particularly clear. The more honest we are with ourselves, the quicker we can purposely deal with them. The necessity of autonomy can be dissolved by the following principle of action: **MANAGING weaknesses means ASKING for help.**

## ***Four Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: Make the Choice, Because Managing Weaknesses is Active, Not Reactive**

This operating principle is really about MANAGING, as it is a very active approach. According to the dictionary, “managing” is the coordination of activities with the purpose of achieving given goals. So, if we manage our weaknesses in a deliberate way, it means we determine if, when and how much help we need to seek and accept.

This is an important insight. After all, asking for help often feels like a loss of control. But instead, the exact opposite is actually the case. We remain self-determined within our framework because we retain leadership and control to the extent that we consciously decide to seek and accept help ourselves. Asking for help requires your freedom of choice, and your active participation.

### **Tip 2: Remember King Solomon’s Words That "Two are Better than One."**

In the Bible, King Solomon wrote about how much we depend on the support and help of others:

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

As human beings, we are created in a way that we are ultimately unable to help ourselves. This is both frustrating and encouraging. This truth applies to all of us, and that means we're in good company when it comes to asking for help.

### **Tip 3: Offer Help to Others**

We have an inner sense of justice. Of course, to different degrees, but basically we subconsciously try to create an inner balance of give and take. This mechanism also helps with the underlying principle of action. The more we're willing to help others, the more willing we are to ask for help ourselves. This is where the golden rule applies: "*Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.*"

### **Tip 4: Manage Weaknesses, Not Laziness**

Seeking help and accepting it is an important process, but only when getting support is really necessary. A simple question can help you navigate this: "*Am I managing a real weakness of mine or just my laziness?*" This may sound rather harsh at first, but there is an important differentiation within the question. It's the difference between "being able" and "being willing," which defines the difference between real weakness (not being able to do something) and laziness (not being willing to do something). The more honest we are in answering the question, the more honestly we can seek and accept help. Because getting help isn't about getting a free ride or a handout.

## ***Four Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Holding Negative Assumptions**

One of the biggest pitfalls in communication is to believe we already know what the other person is thinking and how they will respond. This attempt at mind-reading regularly causes problems because we base our behavior on an assumption for which there is no factual basis. In fact, we can never know exactly what someone else is thinking. We can only assume. When asking for help, these assumptions unfortunately often turn out negative. We might assume, "*He'll probably say no anyway,*" or we might think, "*She doesn't have time to help me,*" or even, "*They won't take my problem seriously.*" When we hold such negative assumptions, we don't ask for help or even ask for support in a way that the other person is more likely to reject, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy and holding us back from achieving our goals.

### **Trap 2: Hinting Diffusely Instead of Asking Directly**

Don't beat around the bush. The more directly and clearly we ask for help, the better. Not only does a clear request make it clear what we want, but it also gives clarity to the other person so they better understand exactly what we need. Common examples of unclear, indirect asks include:

*"It would be nice if..."* or *"If it were possible for you at some point to..."*

Both examples have one thing in common: They don't give the other person a clear signal that we NEED their help. This can cause misunderstandings, unnecessarily burdens the situation and strains the relationship.

### **Trap 3: Overestimating the Uniqueness of Our Problems**

"*My situation is unique.*" A typical statement showing one thing: The perspective on our own problems and challenges is usually very individual. Which typically leads to the following thought: "*Nobody can help me anyway.*" A conclusion that may even be reinforced by the fact that I don't trust others to be able to help me in the first place. A very critical trap – especially when it comes to managing weaknesses in a sensible way. If this is how I see things, I am and will inevitably remain "alone" with my problems and challenges. A real dilemma – especially in crises. After all, the lack of exchange with others blocks two possible positive effects: First, the experience that I am NOT the only one. And secondly, the chance to get support.

### **Trap 4: Waiting for Help to Fall Into Your Lap**

Hoping for help is different than asking for help. If we find it difficult to seek and accept help, we typically act with the hope that the people around us will eventually figure it out by themselves. We pray that, without making a specific effort, the desired outcome or results will simply fall into our laps. This is a dangerous approach, often associated with disappointment. Because no matter how sad we may look or how weak our voice may sound, it's not the responsibility of those around us to recognize this and to react to it. Instead, good management of our weaknesses requires that we specifically ask for help and support.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **Are Weaknesses Just Deficits of Ability?**

No, this is about much more than just your personal skills and competences. Rather, it's about all kinds of resources that aren't available to you in the current situation, be it knowledge, money, connections, etc. It's important to define the term "weakness" as wide as possible in order to get the help you need. Managing weaknesses requires, above all, that you take a close look at what you need to overcome a challenge, and whether you have what you need. And in doing so, your view of missing resources should by no means be too limited.

### **How Do You Protect Yourself from "Hidden Contracts" or Strings Attached to an Offer of Help?**

Use your intuition (i.e. your gut feeling). If you have the impression that there is an unexpressed expectation or strings attached to someone's offer of support to you, simply address this openly by asking them! Of course, the other party can still deny this, but at least it has been addressed in advance, and you can refer back to this discussion later if problems arise. Let us add one more thing: People who have a need for social harmony often have hidden or unspoken expectations when they help others. To avoid disturbing social harmony, they might not express their expectations openly. Simply ask what might be expected by them for the desired help. All that any of us can do is work with what we know, and if there are no open expectations, we should consider this a non-issue. Otherwise we can become too paralyzed in seeking and accepting help.

### **At What Point Are You Asking for Too Much Help?**

The answer is simple: You'll know you've gone too far when the community around you no longer wants to help you. In other words, the assessment of how much help is appropriate is up to the helper rather than the person who needs it. After all, help is ultimately a gift, and the size of a gift is decided by the giver and not by the recipient. There's another important underlying principle: Thinking too much for others overwhelms us and artificially limits others. Overthinking this question can lead us to not trust others' ability to decide for themselves if they really want to help us. In other words, it's our job to ask for help. It's the other person's job to respond.

### **Is Getting Help a Form of "Exploitation"?**

For many people, giving is a form of fulfilment, especially when helping is done voluntarily and is appreciated accordingly. Consequently, asking for help is not a form of "exploiting," provided the other person can freely choose to grant or refuse help. Moreover, by asking for help you may even give someone else the chance to give you something and thus having a sense of personal fulfilment. This realization helps us to overcome the inner hurdle of asking for help.

## Your Workbook (Part 3/10)

### *Managing Weaknesses Means Asking for Help.*

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):  
*How well do I live this principle of action?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

*To what do I attribute this?*

*"There is no fish without bones and no man without blemishes."*  
– Julius Wilhelm Zingref

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- Make the Choice, Because Managing Weaknesses is Active, Not Reactive
- Remember King Solomon's Words That "Two are Better than One."
- Offer Help to Others
- Manage Weaknesses, Not Laziness

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Holding Negative Assumptions
- Hinting Diffusely Instead of Asking Directly
- Overestimating the Uniqueness of Our Problems
- Waiting for Help to Fall Into Your Lap

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- Are Weaknesses Just Deficits of Ability?
- How Do You Protect Yourself from "Hidden Contracts" or Strings Attached to an Offer of Help?
- At What Point Are You Asking for Too Much Help?
- Is Getting Help a Form of "Exploitation"?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***

*(Managing Weaknesses Means Asking for Help.).*

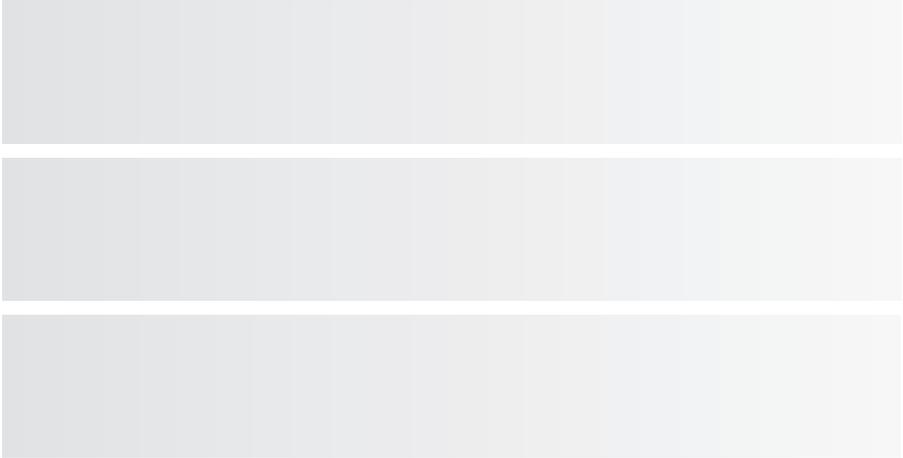
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I honestly and openly deal with my weaknesses and limitations, even in crisis situations.
- I receive valuable support from my environment.
- I feel relief.
- I experience a sense of community.
- I don't feel that I constantly have to publicly display a strong persona.
- I have a chance of regaining strength in weakness.
- I am not path-blocking, but goal-oriented.

*"If you don't want to help yourself, nobody can help you."*

– Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi

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1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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4.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"You will be loved only where you can show yourself  
to be weak without provoking strength."*

– Theodor W. Adorno

*Chapter 4*

**The Pessimism  
Associated With Change**

*Am I Allowed To Still See  
Opportunities Even in a Crisis?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I see problems and critical situations as an opportunity  
for positive change.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I consciously accept change as part of life.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

## The Pessimism Associated With Change

*I deliberately focus on not perceiving change as threatening.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I'm very flexible in adapting to change.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

You don't see change as a normal part of life, but instead you are struggling with it. This is why you're not aware of the opportunities that arise from it.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. I am combating change rather than using it.
2. When I am under pressure, I am not able to see any options.
3. I am looking backwards, not forwards.
4. I resign and give up because things keep changing.
5. Every change triggers the next perceived crisis.
6. I tend to hold on to useless habits.
7. Every change means uncertainty.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You are ready, even in crisis situations, to actively look for future opportunities. This will also give you more options to solve the challenge.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I am deliberately using change rather than fighting it.
2. In each change I discover new options.
3. I am looking to the future, not the past.
4. I am flexible in adapting to change.
5. Change doesn't trigger resignation in me.
6. I can quickly change useless habits.
7. I always see the positive sides of change.

## ***You Have to WANT to See Opportunities.***

Our mind's vision and focus is limited, unfortunately. In every moment of our lives, an extremely large amount of information flows into us, but we are only able to perceive a small part of it.

This is more than just an interesting observation. Instead, it's about the mechanism that determines how we encounter any given situation.

We can influence what we direct our (limited) focus on. We can even direct our perception, and this is an important key to dealing with crises. A crisis drains our energy level, tugs at our patience, changes our emotions and shifts our focus. The direction in which our attention is pointed, usually points backwards and downwards, but only rarely forwards and upwards.

There's a huge temptation to deal only with the crisis itself, and with the crisis' cause, extent and immediate consequences (focusing backwards and downwards). We often don't focus on the potential solutions, a future-oriented perspective, and any opportunities that could arise (focusing forwards and upwards). A crisis makes a forwards- and upwards-perspective difficult. When we're discouraged or feeling defeated by a challenge, it's hard to keep that chin up and eyes forward.

Typically, around 70% of our thoughts revolve around what we want to avoid, and this increases even more when we're in the trenches of a challenge. There is only one way to tackle this: We have to WANT it. Too simple? Maybe. But it's the only technique that's proven to be effective, because whatever we don't want to perceive will remain beyond our grasp.

Our focus works like a magnifying glass. It enlarges what we direct our attention towards. John F. Kennedy once said, *“The word crisis in Chinese is composed of two characters - one signifying danger and the other opportunity.”*

Both factors are constantly present. Now the question is which one to focus our magnifying glass on. If "avoid" is more important than "achieve," then we see the danger. If we instead focus on “achieve” instead of “avoid,” we’re better able to see the opportunity. Both exist in every crisis. The question is which one you desire to see the most. Opportunities can arise for us **IN** the crisis or **THROUGH** the crisis.

It helps to understand a crisis as exactly what it really is: It's a dramatic situation bringing major changes to your life. Why is this so important? Because it's precisely in these changes, and not the dramatic situation, where we can take a legitimate look for opportunities. Changes result in new constellations, new frameworks and thus - in a figurative sense - a new game is on. And with every "new game," it's worth taking a perspective that is opportunity-oriented rather than problem-oriented.

The simple but relevant questions are: What exactly are the changes taking place right now? And what opportunities could there be for me? It's not the questions themselves that matter, but the inner attitude in which we ask ourselves and answer them.

One more thought: Someone is going to benefit from these changes anyway. And why should this not be us? The thinking trap lies in our pessimism about change. The solution lies in the principle of operation: **You have to WANT to see opportunities.**

## ***Four Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: Be Target-Fixed Instead of Path-Glued**

Opportunities are options. But this requires that we're actually open to options when dealing with a situation, and that we're open to more than one way of dealing with the crisis or challenge. In a challenge, there's both a path and a goal/target. If the path is more important to us than the goal, we may not succeed. For example, when there is an insurmountable obstacle on the path. If, on the other hand, the target/goal is more important to us than the path, then we're empowered and ready to take a different route than we originally planned if the alternative path gets us closer to our target. Especially in crises, focusing on the target and not the path allows us to search and find the best options at all times.

### **Tip 2: Appreciate Limitations as a Focusing Factor**

Deadlines are one form of limitation. The closer a deadline gets, the more we focus on what needs to be done. A classic example of this is a research thesis, which is usually not completed until the student's final deadline. Most of us are motivated by deadlines, and we can intentionally make use of this attribute in a crisis because in no other situation are our time limitations as great as when we're trying to solve a challenge. Instead of struggling with the consequences of the crisis, it is more effective to acknowledge them as an aid. Our limitations force us to concentrate.

### **Tip 3: Use Headwinds as an Opportunity to Fly**

Airplanes always take off and land against the wind. This analogy can help us to see potential opportunities in a crisis. After all, the problems,

challenges and limitations that we are repeatedly faced with make for the greatest achievements. This can be explained by the fact that an essential factor in dealing with change in a goal-oriented manner is the "suffering" we experience (i.e. the need to do something). A common refrain says, "Necessity is the mother of invention." That is why we should also consider the acute problems and changes in a crisis as an occasion for active opportunity-brainstorming. Although this is not an easy pill to swallow for our emotions (because problems are extremely challenging emotionally), it's a very helpful inner attitude.

### **Tip 4: Let Yourself "Fail Fast" in a Crisis**

One popular principle for managing ideas and innovations is known as the "Fail Fast" approach. This describes seeking the fastest possible method for identifying and testing opportunities, which also intentionally includes the risk of failure. The faster we find out that something is NOT working, the faster we can focus our energy and resources on something that DOES work. In a crisis, it doesn't help to need absolute certainty in seeing and seizing opportunities – because there won't be any. Rather, we need the inner permission to tackle something now, and accept that it might fail, which makes it easier to see and eventually seize opportunities.

## ***Four Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Mourning the Past**

Which direction are we looking? We need this clarity in a crisis, especially with regard to our perspectives on the past and future. If we keep clinging to how things used to be, it blinds us to the future. When changes are unwanted (and a crisis is full of them) it's very natural to feel a sense of loss and grief. Give yourself permission to mourn, but not for too long. A crisis demands dealing with what's at hand, and setting yourself up for a successful future, instead of holding tightly to the past.

### **Trap 2: Wishing You'd Done Something Differently**

This is a very classic trap, especially in times of crisis. You might think to yourself, *"If I would have known that earlier,"* or, *"If only I had made a different choice,"* or, *"If so-and-so had just chosen a different option."* Yet no amount of what-ifs and if-onlys can change our present circumstances. Constantly reliving past situations and replaying past scenarios over and over again blocks us from focusing forward.

It can also put undue pressure on ourselves to handle future tasks with even better consideration and analysis. That's why it's important to replace "would have" with "could." Instead of wishing the past was different, ask: *"What could I do today to make a difference for tomorrow?"*

### **Trap 3: Waiting for Perfect Conditions**

It's normal to desire the perfect conditions before making a choice or taking action. After all, it makes us feel more comfortable with our choice, because so-called perfect conditions promise perfect outcomes. The truth is that there's no such thing as perfect conditions. And waiting for the perfect time shows that we aren't looking for actual opportunities in the current situation, and are instead waiting for the situation to change. A better choice is asking what can be done today, no matter what today looks like.

### **Trap 4: Moving to the "How" Too Quickly**

Of course, the possibility of implementing opportunities needs to be realistic. And yet during the search for opportunities, it's a hindrance if we focus too quickly on the question on whether the action or choice we're wanting to take is practical or not. We should always focus first on the WHAT instead of the HOW. Instead of asking "*HOW is this possible?*," ask yourself, "*WHAT is possible?*" This simple word switch opens up a whole new world of possibilities.

In difficult situations, it's very natural to keep checking if things can actually be achieved. Alas, this will seriously narrow our view, only letting us see the things that are immediately possible. There could be additional options that may seem impossible at first, but will later be possible. It's exactly these kinds of options that we end up ignoring when we focus too quickly on feasibility and implementation (the HOW) instead of the WHAT.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **Why is it Difficult to See Opportunities in a Crisis?**

One of the most important reasons is the fact that fears distort our reality (and in a crisis, fear is our constant companion). Our fears force us to focus on what is threatening us and not on the possibilities that lie beyond the threat. This drastically limits our focus and forces us to think in terms of avoidance rather than achievement. It requires an inner act of strength to fight against this. This can be done, but only with the necessary energy. We have to really WANT it. The amount of energy we have to invest is also influenced by the fact that seeing opportunities in a crisis is exhausting. Why? Creativity is exhausting. It's easier to describe the problem than to gather possible solutions. By describing a problem, we can let ourselves go emotionally. Gathering possible solutions, on the other hand, is a more rational process. In a crisis, our emotions usually take the forefront, and if we give too much room to the problems, the wrong thoughts will quickly take center stage. All possible chances, no matter how big they may be, will simply get overlooked.

But it remains a choice we have to make. American entrepreneur Isaac Lidsky found that out when he lost his sight due to a disease and was initially convinced that a good life would no longer be possible due to his blindness. It was only when he came to see his blindness as an opportunity for completely new views that everything changed. It was a conscious decision to shift his own focus away from limitations and towards possibilities. Today, Lidsky is a successful author and speaker, and the only blind person who works as a court writer for the United States Supreme Court.

### **What if I'm Just a Pessimist?**

Again, this comes down to choice. And pessimism is not so much about our character as it is about our own will. After all, "seeing opportunities" is not a question of ability, but of choice. You can choose to seek and find opportunities. It has nothing to do with how "good" the opportunities are, but about whether we're consistent and purposeful in our search. Those who don't see any opportunities at all have not bothered looking. We always have a choice. Even doing nothing is a choice.

### **Why Do We React so Irritably to Being Told to Keep Our Chin Up in a Crisis?**

When people offer us clichéd advice, we don't feel taken seriously. It sounds like a platitude that doesn't adequately assess the gravity of our crisis, and it can even make our problems feel trivial. Moreover, it doesn't hold any actual advice to help you with what you're facing!

Dealing with a crisis is not simply about identifying opportunities, but also about a comprehensive assessment of our situation. The holistic view is therefore not limited to opportunity-seeking, it is based on the fact that we also deal with the challenges of the crisis and by no means ignore them. So, simple advice like "You can do it!" feels too shallow and is therefore definitely not appropriate in times of crisis.

## Your Workbook (Part 4/10)

### *You Have to WANT to See Opportunities.*

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):  
*How well do I live this principle of action?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

*To what do I attribute this?*

*“The future has several names. For the weak, it is impossible; for the fainthearted, it is unknown; but for the valiant, it is ideal.”*

– Victor Hugo

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- Be Target-Fixed Instead of Path-Glued
- Appreciate Limitations as a Focusing Factor
- Use Headwinds as an Opportunity to Fly
- Let Yourself “Fail Fast” in a Crisis

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Mourning the Past
- Wishing You’d Done Something Differently
- Waiting for Perfect Conditions
- Moving to the "How" Too Quickly

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- Why is it Difficult to See Opportunities in a Crisis?
- What if I'm Just a Pessimist?
- Why Do We React so Irritably to Being Told to Keep Our Chin Up in a Crisis?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***

*(You Have to WANT to See Opportunities.).*

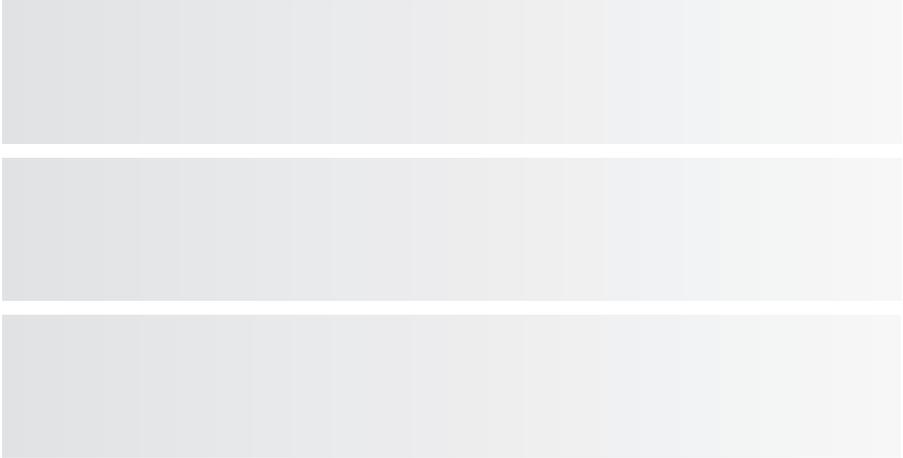
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I am deliberately using change rather than fighting it.
- In each change I discover new options.
- I am looking to the future, not the past.
- I am flexible in adapting to change.
- Change doesn't trigger resignation in me.
- I can quickly change useless habits.
- I always see the positive sides of change.

*"We all have big changes in our lives  
that are more or less a second chance."*

– Harrison Ford

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal gray bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy when implementing the principle of action.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal gray bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three biggest challenges in implementing the principle of action.

***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (You Have to WANT to See Opportunities.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"The starting point for the greatest ventures  
often lies in barely perceptible opportunities."*

– Demosthenes

*Chapter 5*

**The Generalization  
Of Dangers**

*How Can I Deal  
with the Fear Of Risk?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I look at the facts and try to relate risks to my situation  
as precisely as possible.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I'm able to actively and consciously avoid thoughts  
that lead to a disastrous outcome.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I'm aware that not every risk will end in real, negative consequences.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I'm aware that generalizing potential risks only makes it more difficult to manage the crisis.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

You over-estimate the risks in a crisis or challenge. This increases your fear of the unsolvable.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. I am driven by fear and uncertainty.
2. I miss the opportunity of acting in time.
3. I make thoughtless decisions.
4. My problems are growing more and more unsolvable in my mind.
5. I immediately perceive possible risks as facts and get caught up in catastrophic thinking.
6. I imagine consequences that may not even exist.
7. I focus on the things I cannot change and thereby increase my stress levels.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You are ready to view risks specifically in relation to yourself. This reduces your fear of the unsolvable.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I am able to distinguish between real facts and perceived fear.
2. I understand that I can't predict the future.
3. I have a structured approach to the prevention of risks.
4. I can rationalize my fear with facts.
5. I am aware that risks initially only describe possible consequences, but no facts.
6. I can distinguish which risks are relevant for me and which are not relevant.
7. I can overcome the feeling of being overwhelmed.

## ***Concretizing Risks, Not Generalizing Them.***

Crises threaten us, the status quo and, above all, our future. But really, how great are the risks? And how likely are they to occur? Give these two questions special attention. When dealing with a crisis in a targeted manner, we must have an honest and specific assessment of the risks.

Two subliminal desires are adversarial to a concrete, honest risk assessment:

**1. The Desire for Distancing:** Concretizing risks (i.e. really thinking them through) or even articulating how they affect us will make those risks feel personal. This can result in us feeling overwhelmed, worried and anxious, elevating our fear of the risks. For instance, saying “*the economy is going down the drain*” is different from saying “*I’m going to lose my job at the end of the month and won’t be able to afford food.*” The more specific, the more personal and the closer a risk feels, the more threatening it appears. So, we hide behind generalization in order to stay at a distance from the risk.

**2. The Desire to Reduce Risks:** We often feel worried that concretizing risks will make them seem bigger. We keep things general or abstract as a form of self-protection. However, this strategy usually doesn't work out the way we want. Any form of generalizing risks may initially reduce how big they seem, but it doesn't make the risks go away. The risks are still present.

Both desires (staying distant from risks, and trying to reduce our risks) have the same effect: Instead of looking the risks directly in their face and gaining a realistic assessment of their relevance, we remain at the point of abstract, nebulous generalization.

In doing so, our risks are perceived to be more important than they actually are as we treat them like potential disasters.

Mark Twain put this very aptly: *"In my life I have suffered an unimaginable number of disasters. Most of them never happened."* He is describing a well-researched phenomenon in psychology. It's called "catastrophic thinking," which is the compulsive imagination of the worst consequences that could happen to us:

Turbulence on an airplane? We imagine ourselves dying in a fiery crash.

A headache? It could be cancer!

Our 10-year-old child gets a C on a school exam? We envision them not getting into university and not having a fulfilling career.

It starts with a generalizing view of possible risks, which then grow increasingly threatening in our perception as we imagine the worst possible outcome. The resulting fears eventually take on a life of their own!

These negative thoughts, if we would look at them soberly and precisely, often aren't legitimate at all. The more we repeat these negative thoughts, the more they solidify. There's only one remedy for this: Looking precisely and concretely at the risks, and figuring out exactly how much worry or stress is justified. The problem is the generalization of the risks, not the risks themselves. That is why the principle of action applies: **Concretizing risks, not generalizing them.**

## ***Four Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: Evaluate Facts, But Always in Context**

*"Don't believe any statistics you haven't faked yourself,"* says a popular unattributed quote. In a crisis, it's important to look as closely as possible at the facts without losing sight of the context. A simple example: It's helpful to keep a good eye on your bank account and the current balance, but it's only really significant if you also take into account the relevant context, such as projected income and upcoming expenses. Only by taking in the big picture can you draw relevant conclusions. Otherwise, the evaluation remains incomplete and lacks significance.

There's a danger of looking at individual facts without context, especially in a crisis. It's dangerous to grab one clue or one fact and run with it when you're stressed, anxious or fearful. In order to evaluate facts without overestimating their significance, take a rational (not emotional) look at both the facts detail and the context.

### **Tip 2: Remember That Risks are Potential Consequences, But Are NOT Yet Real**

Risks are NOT YET consequences. They are possible, perhaps even probable, but not yet real. This leads us to two important conclusions. First, there might be a chance that they will not occur at all, or at least not as dramatically as you think. Second, we have the opportunity to take appropriate measures against them. However, both outcomes for action are based on one prerequisite: the concrete observation and assessment of the situation.

**Tip 3: Look as Closely as Possible from the Very Beginning**

It's better to know all the facts right away than to have surprises later. This approach isn't everyone's cup of tea. Especially in difficult situations, we don't always want to know everything all at once. We might feel fear about realizing the complete drama of the situation, and hope that by ignoring it, that it will turn out not that bad after all. Instead, we just look quickly at the situation before moving on to other things. But without close inspection, we cannot fully grasp the situation. On the surface, this approach makes it easier to deal with the crisis. In reality, ignoring a crisis places an extremely heavy emotional burden on us.

**Tip 4: Consciously Distinguish the Two Forms of Fear**

In psychology, we distinguish between fear as a state anxiety and fear as a trait anxiety. This distinction is important for how we deal with risks. State anxiety refers to an acute threat. It thus triggers a temporary emotion as a result of a real danger.

In contrast, trait anxiety leads us to assess situations as dangerous even without an acute threat. It's therefore a projection of our mind.

The former fear is legitimate, but the latter may be completely irrational. It's therefore all the more important to assess risks in a crisis in very specific terms: Which risks are acute and specific dangers, which ones are only a vague projection?

## ***Three Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Fear Narrows Our Perspective**

Fear has many effects on us. One of the effects that can be particularly critical is a massive narrowing of our perspective of the current situation and thus an incomplete assessment of the risks. The reason for this lies in the impact fear has on us. This is already evident in the origin of the word. It goes back to the Latin terms "angustus," which means "narrow," and "angere," which means "to tie up." And since we are always confronted with fear in a crisis, this is exactly the effect that can occur. In the truest sense of the word, fear narrows our perspective and ties us up in a state of paralysis. Counteracting this is exhausting, but absolutely necessary. It's only if we strive to completely perceive the situation with fresh eyes that we can distinguish the real risks from the fictitious ones.

### **Trap 2: Disaster Speakers are Also Disaster Thinkers**

*"Watch your words."* This is so important because our words are both the expression of our thoughts and the soil that certain thoughts draw their strength from. Our words and thoughts act like two mirrors facing each other. Our words reflect our thoughts, but our thoughts also reflect our words. This mutual influence is especially critical in a crisis. If you are constantly talking about the drama of the crisis, this will be reflected in your thinking. Talking about the disaster also means that you're thinking about it precisely in this way. This poor approach finally leads to what is expressed by the following Chinese proverb: *"Pay attention to your words, they become deeds. Pay attention to your deeds, they become habits. Watch your habits, they become your destiny."*

### **Trap 3: Attempts to Tackle It ALL at Once**

This trap describes a form of “doing things for the sake of doing things”. This is quite typical in situations of overstrain. When we’re in the midst of a crisis, we feel we must tackle it all, fix it all and overcome all of our challenges immediately and completely.

You can see this effect again and again in crises. Hardly surprising, because a crisis challenges us so much that the feeling of "total overstrain" sets in first, especially when we have a blanket view of risks. This makes our problems appear overwhelmingly large and threatening, and the feeling of overload is further intensified.

Unfortunately, these kind of forced activities result in a vicious cycle. When we try to fix all our problems at once, we feel overburdened, which then feeds our desire to continue tackling it all at once. Now exhaustion is added to the fear of the crisis and its possible risks - a duet forming an alliance against us.

To counterbalance this, focus only on the essential. However, this first requires you to get a precise overview of the situation. But, this is only possible if you approach possible risks and their evaluation with the attitude of, *"I want to know it PRECISELY – even when it hurts."*

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **Where are the Parallels to Classical Risk Management?**

Risk assessment plays a role not only in a crisis. It can therefore be helpful to look at "classic" risk management for your own orientation.

A common five-step guideline is often used for the risk management of projects. Each one of the steps confirms the principle "concretizing risks, not generalizing them":

**Step 1:** Don't count on your luck. It's better to uncover the risks of your project right at the beginning, instead of being unnecessarily surprised later.

**Step 2:** Good risk management always starts with a preferably complete compilation of existing and potential risks. Therefore, in the first step you should write down all risks as comprehensively as possible.

**Step 3:** Call a meeting with all parties and comrades-in-arms and discuss which risks could seriously endanger the project. Encourage as broad a discussion as possible about any risks. This will give you a realistic picture from the outset of the difficulties that may be expected.

**Step 4:** Anyone who names risks should communicate them in specific terms. Describe them as concrete as possible. Risks are always simply facts, and should be described in a factual (not emotional) way

**Step 5:** Keep reminding yourself and everyone else that it's completely safe to name and list existing risks.

### **My Specific Risk is Threatening My Existence. What Should I Do?**

Of course, this is not about minimizing or trivializing risks in any way. Whatever is present is really present. But by substantiating them, we will have the chance to evaluate the risks and to find possible starting points containing some solutions.

Picture a steep mountain face, which we are supposed to climb without any aids. Any mistake can be fatal. Therefore, it's all the more important to search the smooth rock face as carefully as possible to discover even the smallest bumps and ledges. The situation is extremely dangerous, but a detailed assessment will at least provide the basis for dealing with it in a goal-oriented manner.

### **Isn't Fear Useful?**

Fear can save our lives because of its warning function. So, when we are afraid of imminent danger, we are sometimes capable of achievements that wouldn't have been possible under normal circumstances. Healthy fear is therefore appropriate and important. However, if fear leads to obstruction and inner paralysis, or if it takes on pathological forms, it's naturally counterproductive. To reduce or even eliminate these negative effects of fear, distinguish between real and perceived dangers. This is only possible if we face up to the specific assessment of the personal risks that arise from the crisis.

## Your Workbook (Part 5/10)

### *Concretizing Risks, Not Generalizing Them.*

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):  
*How well do I live this principle of action?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

*To what do I attribute this?*

*“We are all afraid. The difference lies in the question of what.”*  
– Frank Thiess

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- Evaluate Facts, But Always in Context
- Remember That Risks are Potential Consequences, But Are NOT Yet Real
- Look as Closely as Possible from the Very Beginning
- Consciously Distinguish the Two Forms of Fear

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Fear Narrows Our Perspective
- Disaster Speakers are Also Disaster Thinkers
- Attempts to Tackle It ALL at Once

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- Where are the Parallels to Classical Risk Management?
- My Specific Risk is Threatening My Existence. What Should I Do?
- Isn't Fear Useful?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action  
(Concretizing Risks, Not Generalizing Them.).***

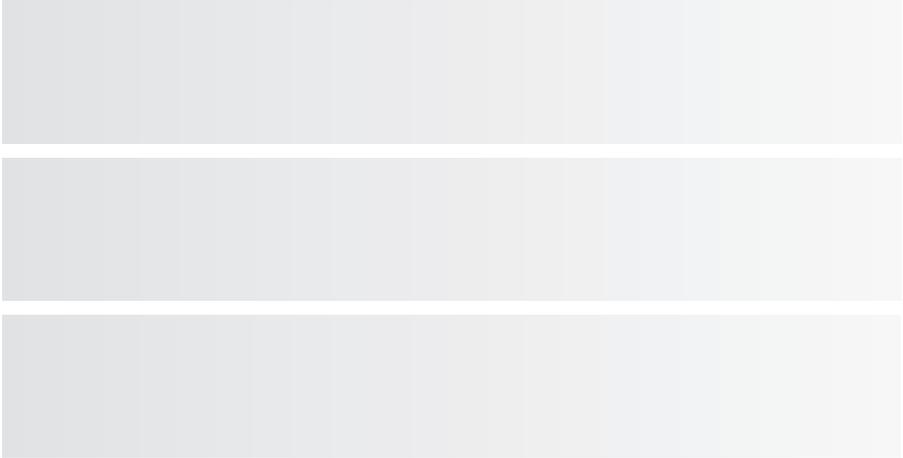
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I am able to distinguish between real facts and perceived fear.
- I understand that I can't predict the future.
- I have a structured approach to the prevention of risks.
- I can rationalize my fear with facts.
- I am aware that risks initially only describe possible consequences, but no facts.
- I can distinguish which risks are relevant for me and which are not relevant.
- I can overcome the feeling of being overwhelmed.

*"It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare,  
it is because we do not dare that they are difficult."*

– Lucius Annaeus Seneca

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal gray bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy to implement.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal gray bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three biggest challenges in implementing the principle of action.

***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (Concretizing Risks, Not Generalizing Them.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more  
painful than the risk it took to blossom."*

– Anaïs Nin

*Chapter 6*

**The Predominance of  
Our Own Problems**

*Why Do My Problems  
Appear Bigger in a Crisis?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I see my problems in relation to the problems of others.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I'm ready to be available for others, especially in  
crisis situations, and stand by them.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I'm aware that I over-estimate and evaluate my problems from a subjective perspective.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I make sure to see others' problems as well, so that I don't limit my perspective to my own issues.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

Your focus is exclusively on your own problems and you lose the proportion in relation to their actual size.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. I feel depressed and without hope.
2. I withdraw and isolate myself from my environment.
3. I feel overwhelmed by my problems and my thoughts.
4. My problems seem unique and unsolvable.
5. My problems dominate my thinking.
6. I lack the feeling of belonging.
7. My thinking turns into a downward spiral in my mind.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You are demonstrating an interest in the problems of others and this helps you to put your own problems into perspective.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I practice empathy for myself when I practice empathy for others.
2. I am able to discover my own potential by actively supporting others.
3. I understand that my perception of problems is always subjective.
4. I keep my problems in perspective by considering others, which helps me to better see my problems' solutions.
5. I break the downward spiral of negative thoughts when I distract myself by looking at others.
6. I am able to see chances, opportunities and positive things in a crisis, despite my problems.
7. I am expanding my horizon for solutions.

## ***Empathy puts our Own Problems into Perspective.***

The magnitude of problems is relative – at least when it comes to our personal assessment of their relevance. This observation is important, because especially in crises there's a danger of problems appearing larger in our perception than they actually are. Of course, we have to deal intentionally with problems and possible risks – but not all the time. Otherwise our thoughts become too focused on ourselves. They begin to circulate in our minds and eventually dominate us. That is why a "break from the ME" is important in crises. How exactly? By shifting the focus from ourselves to others (at least temporarily), taking a more conscious look at people around us – especially their needs and problems. Easier said than done, but especially important in crises. Because dealing exclusively with ourselves and our own problems can have two negative effects:

**1. Feeling Isolated:** A predominance of our own problems causes us to live too much in our own thoughts and our own little world. In a crisis or challenging situation, some of us withdraw partially or even completely into our own mind, and disconnect from fellowship and community. This goes against our human nature. We are social beings and are in need of interaction – and in a crisis it's especially important to have this. Furthermore, if our thinking revolves exclusively around ourselves, it may also have negative effects on how we interact with others and therefore might even damage relationships. To make matters worse, it leaves us believing "*I am alone*".

**2. Feeling Overpowered:** A sole focus on ourselves ensures that we are spending all our (thinking) time on dealing with our situation. As a result, our own problems grow bigger and bigger in our imagination. Spinning

thoughts begin to overwhelm us – until at some point they appear to be overpowering. This effect is best explained by the phenomenon of selective perception: Everything we focus on becomes bigger and more powerful in our imagination. This is especially true for all the things we absolutely want to avoid. The term "self-fulfilling prophecy" confirms how strong this inner power is. Giving those problems too much room in our minds allows them to take over. The result is that we feel overpowered.

This is why it's so important to consciously counteract both of these negative effects. How? By broadening our view and intentionally dealing with other people and their challenges and needs. It's not a permanent "away from us", but a temporary "towards others." Of course, this is not a denial of our own situation. Instead, the temporary focus on others is intended to reduce the permanent preoccupation with ourselves so as not to completely "lose our minds."

In doing so, we are actually implementing a mechanism that is called "reframing." In other words, we put our situation into a different framework by expanding our perspective through looking at the problems of others. A quote from Helen Keller shows this effect: *"I cried because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet."* The change of perspective is particularly powerful when we don't just take a fleeting glance at others, but rather look at them empathically. By empathizing with others, the proportions of our own problems change. We are no longer at the mercy of the superiority of personal difficulties, which increase stress or fear. In this way, we start to deprive fear and negative thoughts of their influence on us. **Empathy puts our own problems into perspective.**

## ***Three Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: Empathy Affirms That Reality is Subjective**

Empathy is a part of our emotional intelligence, which we can use for specific purposes. An essential approach to empathy is acknowledging the perspective of the other person and his or her truth. Conversely, empathy also has an interesting effect on us: If the other person's reality is subjective, it obviously also applies to our own reality. So, when we think to ourselves, *"I'd like to have your problems,"* even though the other person has given us a dramatic description, this is obviously also true the other way around. It's a clear indication that our problems are magnified or diminished by our subjective and usually generalizing assessment, and that our problem's factual dimension is not brought into focus.

Marcus Aurelius once said, *"It is not the things in themselves that worry us, but rather it is our interpretation of the meaning of these incidents which determines our reaction."* The interpretation of our situation and our reality is ALWAYS subjective. Empathy is a good way of regularly recognizing this in order to take some of the oppressive power away from our own problems.

### **Tip 2: Consciously Deposit Into Our Social Network**

Our social network and community is an important factor in dealing well with a crisis. We need people we can honestly share our problems, hardships and concerns with, and ask for help. We should make a conscious contribution to this network both in good times, and especially in a crisis. The currency you "pay" with is a sincere interest in the other people, their personalities, their current situations, and their problems

and challenges. Showing authentic interest in the other person manifests itself in two characteristics: Our inner attitude towards the other and our actual commitment of time.

In times of crisis, we are typically under pressure and will try to use all our resources – and also our time – for ourselves. However, in doing so, we miss an important effect that the interaction with others during difficult moments can provide for us. Interestingly, talking about our problems with others has positive effects on both the speaker and the listener in terms of overcoming stress and anxiety.

The speaker realizes, *"I am not alone with my problem."* And the listener finds out, *"I am not the only one with problems."* So, no matter which side we are on, talking about problems creates benefits for everyone, so it's a win-win situation. This isn't necessarily about finding a solution. Instead, the shared experience and understanding that we ALL have problems provides the positive perception of fellowship.

### **Tip 3: Offering Individual and Specific Help**

The highest form of empathy is the "outstretched hand." In other words, real support and help. Helping others is distracting, in a positive way, as long as the help is individual and specific. Simply donating a certain amount of money to a random charity is an honorable and altruistic act, but unfortunately quite abstract. Helping a neighbor who can't buy groceries, on the other hand, is very personal. The more specific and personal the help we offer, the more likely it will have a positive effect on our emotional world. One of the reasons is, that it puts one's own problems out of the focus for a moment and puts them into perspective.

## ***Three Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Talking Down Your Own Difficulties as "Luxury Problems"**

*"In comparison, my difficulties are pure luxury problems."*

This is a dangerous assessment and statement. What may sound humble and positive is not at all helpful in a crisis. It's not the goal of the working principle we're discussing: "Empathy puts our own problems into perspective."

We don't want to minimize our own problems and then feel bad about them. Rather, it's about creating a way to face our problems with a different energy and attitude. Our problems – however small or large they may be – should be seen as real.

If we then consciously look at the problems of others, it's not with the intention to make our own difficulties look small or even ridiculous. It's simply to acknowledge that in a crisis we aren't the only ones with difficulties.

This reduces the feeling of being overwhelmed. The more we think we're the only ones with a unique problem or crisis, the greater our problems appear. And fortunately, we aren't that unique in this area. By paying attention to the problems of others we will realize this again and again.

### **Trap 2: Self-Isolation Through Self-Centering**

Isolation and shielding are (unfortunately) not untypical behaviors in a crisis. We retreat and try to deal with the problem by ourselves.

The reasons for this behavior can be complex. Perhaps we're resistant to asking for help, or we have a personal insecurity, or we're embarrassed. Regardless of the reason, self-isolation exaggerates the focus we have on our own problems. Instead of relief, self-isolation provides even more emotional stress. We need to be connected as social beings. We have to pay close attention to this need, especially in crisis situations. A strong indication that this trap is about to "snap" are the thoughts circling in our minds and even chasing us into sleep. They indicate that we are focused too much on ourselves.

Figuratively speaking, "circling thoughts" are just like a pack of lions hunting their prey. First, they separate their prey from the herd, then they attack. Negative, circling thoughts isolate us in exactly the same way, since we are left only looking at ourselves. These thoughts finally attack us in our self-isolation with the feeling of being overwhelmed, of failure, of hopelessness, etc. Because when the "self" becomes bigger and bigger in our perception, so do our problems.

### **Trap 3: Our Rut of Perception**

It's part of our human nature to focus on our problems. But there's a hidden danger of focusing too much on them. When we do, our difficulties, failures and risks move into focus. This can literally lead to a downward spiral of negative thoughts, and above all to a "practiced" routine in our thinking. By practicing the same approach over and over again, we adjust our perception. This predetermines what our full attention is directed to in any given crisis. In order to get out of this "rut of perception," it helps to focus on others and their problems from time to time. In doing so, we consciously interrupt our usual approach and also break the described downward spiral.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **Shouldn't I primarily take care of myself in a crisis?**

Yes and no. In order to put this answer into perspective, the following observation will help: There is an essential difference between egotism and egocentricity. Simply put: Egotism is about you. Egocentricity is ONLY about you.

We naturally look after our own well-being in difficult situations. Anything else would be neither reasonable nor truly honest. In any case, denying this fact or negating our natural needs is neither necessary nor helpful.

However, it's just as useless when our focus turns into ONLY thinking and acting about ourselves. The negative effects of this behavior have many facets. One major facet that is negatively impacted is our relationships. Our social interactions are especially important in crises, because beneficial relationships produce positive emotions and strengthen our self-esteem. These are all aspects we can use in difficult situations. It's therefore worth finding a good balance between self-centeredness and selflessness, because neither of these two, in their extreme form, is ultimately helpful. This can be achieved by temporarily devoting ourselves to others and their needs and problems, even in our own difficult phases.

### **What is Meant by "Defocusing"?**

While focus is important (for example, completing a task in a concentrated manner and without distraction), in some situations defocusing is also valid.

Why? Because too much focus can also bring disadvantages. Here is a simple example: If we form our hands into a "telescope" and look through it, we see a much smaller part of the environment. So, defocusing is not about focusing attention on a specific point, but instead expanding our perception to the bigger picture. Especially in crises, we naturally tend to focus particularly intensely on our own difficulties, which consequently automatically increase in size and relevancy for us. It's therefore important that we also actively defocus by empathically taking notice of other people's problems.

### **What if I Fail to Change My Focus?**

Habits are the opponents of change. This is also true when we want to change a certain behavior or an inner attitude. The familiar old habits battle against our desired new habits. Therefore, we can't just casually change our focus – especially not in crisis situations.

Instead, we have to create specific occasions for change. How? One way is by intentionally blocking out time in our schedules to get in touch with other people. No matter how much time pressure we may be under during a crisis, we have to create this space rigorously. The benefits should be our motivation: On the one hand, our empathy helps the other person and on the other hand, it's a great help for ourselves as well. This way, we break the flow of experiences which have been dominated by the crisis. We are familiar with this effect from situations in which we are in need of ideas, but the mind "shuts down." In this case it helps to just let things rest for a moment. Sleeping over it has shown us many things in a different light – and this effect can be compared to shifting our focus away from us and onto others during a crisis.

## Your Workbook (Part 6/10)

***Empathy puts our Own Problems into Perspective.***

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):

***How well do I live this principle of action?***

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

***To what do I attribute this?***

*“The secret of success is to understand the viewpoint of others.”*

– Henry Ford

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- Empathy Affirms That Reality is Subjective
- Consciously Deposit Into Our Social Network
- Offering Individual and Specific Help

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Talking Down Your Own Difficulties as "Luxury Problems"
- Self-Isolation Through Self-Centering
- Our Rut of Perception

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- Shouldn't I primarily take care of myself in a crisis?
- What is Meant by "Defocusing"?
- What if I Fail to Change My Focus?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***

*(Empathy puts our Own Problems into Perspective.).*

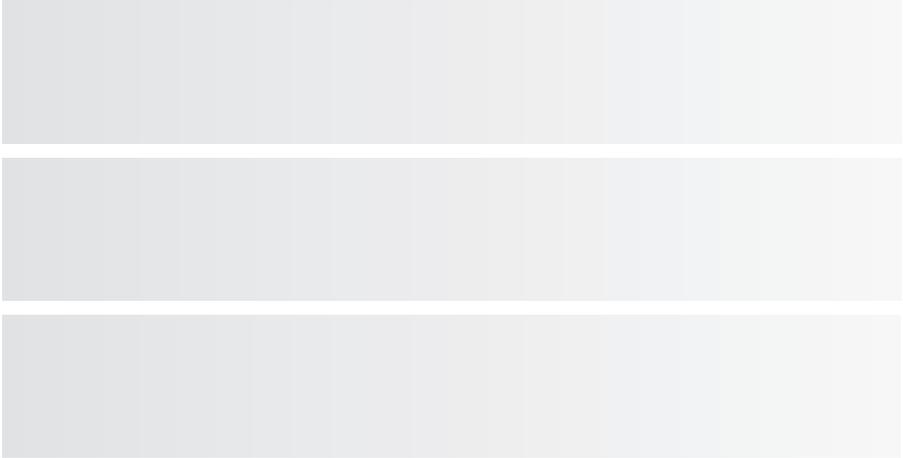
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I practice empathy for myself when I practice empathy for others.
- I am able to discover my own potential by actively supporting others.
- I understand that my perception of problems is always subjective.
- I keep my problems in perspective by considering others, which helps me to better see my problems' solutions.
- I break the downward spiral of negative thoughts when I distract myself by looking at others.
- I am able to see chances, opportunities and positive things in a crisis, despite my problems.
- I am expanding my horizon for solutions.

*"Understanding often reaches much deeper than the mind."*

– Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy when implementing the principle of action.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three biggest challenges in implementing the principle of action.

***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (Empathy puts our Own Problems into Perspective.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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7.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"Everyone thinks that his reality is the real one."*

– Hilde Domin

*Chapter 7*

**Underestimating  
Solidarity**

*How Can I Better Protect  
Myself in a Crisis?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*If it serves the common good, I'm willing to limit and adjust personal matters in times of crisis.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*Cooperation and solidarity are part of my philosophy of life and my basic attitude.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I very much appreciate and support the community I live in.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*The community I live in makes me feel safer and stronger.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

You're lacking focus on the positive effects that a community can have on each of us in times of crisis. A lack of community will weaken your own sense of security and belonging.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. I feel alone and helpless.
2. I perceive community as a burden.
3. I underestimate the power of community.
4. I feel vulnerable to possible difficulties.
5. My problems may seem isolated.
6. I am missing the chance to benefit from solidarity myself.
7. I deprive myself of the feeling of belonging.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You're demonstrating solidarity and interest in the common good during a crisis situation. This strengthens your sense of community, and your own sense of security and belonging.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I am supporting and being supported by the community.
2. I feel connected and not helpless.
3. I am aware of the power of community.
4. I feel empowered by the community.
5. My problems appear more manageable by looking at them in the context of the bigger picture.
6. I contribute to the common good and I also benefit from it.
7. I experience the feeling of belonging.

## ***Protecting Myself Means Protecting the System.***

When you think of the popular phrase, "*All for one and one for all*," what comes to mind? We often think of the three musketeers Athos, Porthos and Aramis, who bravely and faithfully stand by each other and uphold the idealistic ethos of chivalry. Their way of dealing with difficulties and challenges might be from the fictitious novel by Alexandre Dumas, but it gives insight to an important facet in dealing with a crisis: Solidarity.

We aren't alone in this world. This trivial statement has a deeper meaning. We are always within a context (i.e. inside a system). This could be our family, company, society, nation or humanity itself.

And the condition of the system in which we are presently living or working in will thus have a direct effect on our well-being. For example, a barren field won't provide any food. If the system (in this example, the field) is thriving, it's easier for us to be thriving as well. If the system is not doing well, it usually also has a negative effect on us.

In our modern COVID-19 pandemic experience, we can easily transfer this example to healthcare. If healthcare is overburdened, it may not be able to help each of us. In a figurative sense, we are all "in the same boat" where it's important to support the system as best as possible and avoid taking unnecessary advantage of it.

The more each and every one of us keeps the focus on our shared common needs, the more it contributes to mastering the situation. We need solidarity together. Any form of disregarding this principle can make the situation more difficult or even cause dramatic consequences.

Of course, it's important to take care of our own problems in a crisis, but only if we do not damage or harm the system we live in.

If the short-term solution of our personal problems profits us, but it results in long-term difficulties for our environment, we may be thinking too short-term. Since we continue to work or live in the system (e.g. our family or children may be dependent on the system at a later time), thinking in terms of solidarity is not just a nice option, but a reasonable and necessary duty – especially in the context of a crisis. And even more, keeping this in mind also protects us. Because solidarity is also selfish in a positive sense, as we keep our own well-being in mind when we focus on the big picture.

*"If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together,"* advises an African proverb. It describes the power that lies in community, and there are no situations in which this is more necessary than in times of crisis.

Solidarity describes the mutual support in a community. Emotionally, the effect is best described by a famous song that is sung at many soccer stadiums: *"You'll never walk alone."* It's a powerful statement touching thousands of people again and again.

Why? Because it expresses the essence of community and solidarity. Our situation is also affected by the condition of the system. It happens so quickly to us that we often overlook the value of the system and act too selfishly, especially when we are confronted with personal challenges in crisis situations. This makes it important to be particularly attentive and never underestimate the value of solidarity, because **protecting ourselves means protecting the system.**

## ***Three Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: Solidarity is Also Shown in Small Gestures**

It's 9:00 pm in Germany. People are at their front doors, on their balconies or in their yards. They are applauding for minutes. The applause goes to doctors and nurses in appreciation of their efforts against the coronavirus crisis. This daily gesture was a simple but important act of solidarity. It was a demonstration of solidarity, even though the gesture was small and the real effect minimal. And yet it touched and strengthened people. The reason was the shared experience. The power of solidarity is therefore also shown in small gestures which can cause great changes emotionally, and thus have a positive effect on each of us.

### **Tip 2: Reflecting AND Respecting Guidelines**

As humans we are always part of a social system, whether that's a family, a company or a country.

Every system has set structures and rules that are hierarchically defined from someone "above", be it a moral leader, a political leader or a business leader. We should respect these rules in good times and in times of crisis. This way, we strengthen the order and function of the system and thus ultimately protect ourselves. For example, in the context of the coronavirus crisis, if social distancing is initially given as a recommendation in order to limit spreading the disease, but individuals fail to comply, it inevitably leads to a lock down for all of us.

The final outcome is a severe restriction of our freedom. But because many people did not respect the guidelines, this is obviously a necessary

consequence for the protection of all of us. Even the fact that grocery stores did limit the amount of flour or other essential goods that each consumer was allowed to buy was a strict rule in response to hoarding purchases.

Although the provision of food to society was guaranteed, some have felt compelled to buy absurd quantities of flour, toilet paper, etc. Unfortunately, this is a characteristic example of insufficient solidarity. Of course, this doesn't mean we need to accept and implement every guideline blindly, which would be a form of blind obedience. Instead, it's helpful to question the usefulness of set structures and rules. However, as long as these rules and structures don't violate ethical and moral foundations or our own values, we should be respecting them accordingly for everyone's benefit within the system.

### **Tip 3: Cooperation as a Life Principle**

*"While the virus affects the individual, it also attacks society and weakens its solidarity."* This statement can be found in the Italian newspaper La Repubblica on March 13, 2020. This quote describes an effect which is unfortunately typical in a crisis. We're not the only ones threatened, but society as a whole. It's important to counteract this, and cooperating as an expression of solidarity is the natural key. In nature, for example, we find different species cooperating in numerous life-strengthening ways. Biology has a technical term for this. It's called symbiosis. Symbiosis describes the active cooperation of different species in order to benefit each other. Cooperating ensures the survival of plants, animals and humans. If nature works by this principle in normal times, how much more should we keep this in focus in times of crisis? Cooperation is based on an attitude (appreciating solidarity) and thus expresses a conviction: The totality is always more than the sum of its parts.

## ***Three Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Confusing Solidarity with Self-Abandonment**

Solidarity has two major factors: Responsibility for ourselves, AND responsibility for the bigger community. These are an equally relevant pair of tasks for each person. It's crucial to have a certain balance in dealing with both factors.

Focusing solely on ourselves and our needs (maximum personal responsibility) is just as damaging as exclusively focusing on the well-being of others and the system (maximum external responsibility). One feeds into self-centeredness, and the other towards martyrdom. Both extremes are not helpful and both extremes should be avoided. This applies especially to the second aspect, because self-abandonment and giving up one's own needs is NOT a sign of special solidarity.

After all, in the event of an emergency landing on an airline flight, we are supposed to put on the oxygen mask first before assisting others. How can we help others if our own needs (in this example the air we breathe) are not taken care of? We are part of the system, and therefore it's equally about ourselves AND the system.

### **Trap 2: Solidarity Out of Duty Only**

Discipline for the sake of discipline is possible, but not necessarily reasonable. It's different when it comes to being disciplined for the sake of a purpose. In this case discipline becomes a goal-oriented approach to achieve a desired result. If we don't focus on the goal, discipline is only a mindless duty. We merely persevere out of fear of potential consequences.

However, pursuing a certain goal with the help of self-discipline results in a completely different motivational situation. For example, if we try to lose weight because it sounds good, it'll be difficult to pull through. But if we're doing it for a reward, we will be more likely to succeed.

This mechanism is also effective when it comes to a solidary view of the whole situation. When we are committed to the system, we should also see a meaningful goal for us. It's legitimate to ask: What benefits do I personally have if the system I work or live in is functioning well? This is why it's helpful to consider the personal benefits in our solidarity activities.

### **Trap 3: Using the Crisis to Hide Own Problems**

Even before a genuine crisis, there were problems and challenges that made our lives and work more difficult. The way we are dealing with them now shows our concept of solidarity. Naturally, the temptation arises to blame these problems retrospectively on the crisis or even relating them directly to it.

If, for example, we already had financial problems, the crisis may have just come at the right time for us to shift the blame away from ourselves. Now we blame the crisis for our personal issues. It may feel good in the moment, but ultimately this has negative consequences. We're just shifting our personal responsibilities off of ourselves, but are not dealing with the actual problem. In the worst case scenario, instead of supporting the system, we burden it even more. And in doing so, we're acting contrary to the nature of solidarity. Instead of strengthening and supporting the system, we use the crisis to distract from and hide our own mistakes and shortcomings.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **What is Meant by Free Riding?**

You find free riders everywhere, and unfortunately, even in a crisis. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary's definition, a free rider is someone who takes "*a benefit obtained at another's expense or without the usual cost or effort.*"

Watching such behavior can be demotivating, especially when we ourselves are strongly committed to supporting the system. So, it's important that we do not get bothered by free riders too much. They exist, but they are luckily in the minority.

By focusing on them too much, we're tempted to refrain from our own solidarity activities, perhaps even adopting similar behavior. And when everybody turns into a free rider, this can be very damaging to the management of a crisis.

Incidentally, an increased form of free riding is manifested in a behavior we know as greed. Greed harms the community not only passively, but actively. Since the saying "greed eats brains" is unfortunately valid to a certain extent, behavior like this is one of the greatest enemies of solidarity. Reinhard Marx has said: "*I am convinced that human beings are by nature solidary and helpful. But they are susceptible when fear clouds their senses.*"

### **Why Should I Sacrifice For the Community?**

Solidarity can sometimes include an element of sacrifice -- not always, but in some situations. The basic idea here is that a one-time sacrifice should

keep us from having to sacrifice permanently. Think of it as a temporary sacrifice for the sake of the community, but also with a positive long-term effect on yourself. Michael Wollny of the Schwäbische Zeitung states the following in times of the coronavirus crisis: *"It's not about making sure we're not lacking anything presently. It's about no one wanting to witness the many things disappearing from among us in the future."* In crises, we need to see things from a different angle, we need to act differently and thus, if necessary, sacrifice something for the community. Solidarity is a protective factor for the system and thus also for ourselves.

### **What Does "Crisis is Testing the Character" Mean?**

Former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt once said, *"True character is revealed in crisis."* In fact, difficult times can manifest behaviors and traits that would otherwise remain hidden. However, this "testing of character" is less about the question of good or bad character. Instead, it's about the benefits a particular behavior causes for the individual and for the community in overcoming the crisis. In these times, criticism and know-it-all (which typically show up as a pair) are of little use. It might be interesting to see what politicians, supervisors, parents, etc. should have done differently, but as for the present, this is totally irrelevant. Rather, the task at hand is to contribute constructively to a solution. The principle of protecting the system represents an important basic attitude. For if we focus entirely on uncovering past mistakes in order to judge others, we will find ourselves in the courtroom rather than seeking a joint, solidary solution to protect the system and thus ourselves.

## Your Workbook (Part 7/10)

### ***Protecting Myself Means Protecting the System.***

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):  
***How well do I live this principle of action?***

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

***To what do I attribute this?***

*“Solidarity is not a luxury,  
but the condition of existence for human life.”*  
– Norbert Blüm

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- Solidarity is Also Shown in Small Gestures
- Reflecting AND Respecting Guidelines
- Cooperation as a Life Principle

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Confusing Solidarity with Self-Abandonment
- Solidarity Out of Duty Only
- Using the Crisis to Hide Own Problems

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- What is Meant by Free Riding?
- Why Should I Sacrifice For the Community?
- What Does “Crisis is Testing the Character” Mean?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***

*(Protecting Myself Means Protecting the System.).*

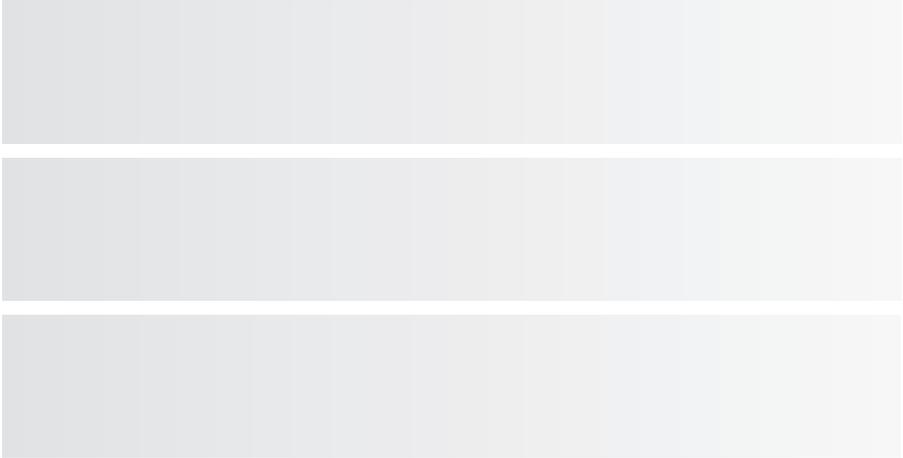
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I am supporting and being supported by the community.
- I feel connected and not helpless.
- I am aware of the power of community.
- I feel empowered by the community.
- My problems appear more manageable by looking at them in the context of the bigger picture.
- I contribute to the common good and I also benefit from it.
- I experience the feeling of belonging.

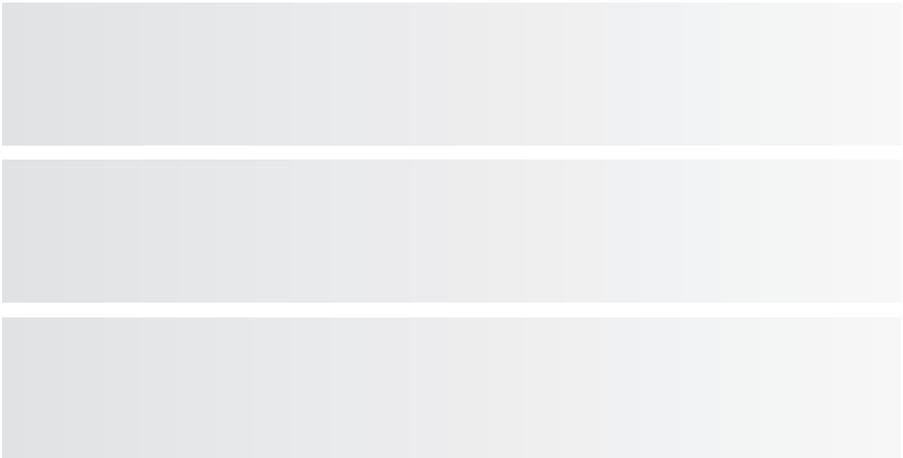
*"You can't tie a knot with just one hand."*

– Mongolian proverb

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy when implementing the principle of action.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

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***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (Protecting Myself Means Protecting the System.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress,  
working together is success."*

– Henry Ford

*Chapter 8*

**The Insignificance  
of Everyday Life**

*How Do I Overcome the Feeling of  
Lacking Purpose and Strength?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I consider daily tasks and duties to be important, even in difficult times.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*It's easy for me to organize my everyday life wisely, even in challenging times.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I am easily happy about partial achievements, even if the greatest success is still far away.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I find it easy to prioritize which tasks are particularly important in a crisis.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

You are lacking the focus on short-term successes in times of crisis and thus also the motivation for accomplishing big goals.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. The absence of the feeling of success makes me feel powerless.
2. My demand on the feeling of success is getting too great.
3. I devalue everyday successes and I have a feeling of worthlessness.
4. I am in danger of putting off unpleasant issues and tasks.
5. I am wasting my time.
6. I am establishing the expectation that big changes need to happen immediately.
7. My motivation is being reduced due to the perceived absence of purpose in my tasks.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You also pursue short-term achievements in your everyday life, even in crisis situations. This gives you the energy and motivation for the bigger goals.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I gain strength to carry on thanks to small moments of success.
2. I value my duties and tasks and I sense a feeling of being appreciated.
3. I focus on what I am achieving and can avoid demotivation.
4. I am able to tackle even unpleasant issues and tasks.
5. I consciously enjoy my leisure time.
6. I am aware that big changes don't happen overnight so I am able to break down big goals into small sub-goals.
7. I get the necessary motivation by feeling that my tasks make sense.

## ***Every Day Needs Its Own Success.***

A lack of perspective drains our energy. Unfortunately, this is confirmed in times of crisis, which an acquaintance of mine has recently expressed concerning the coronavirus pandemic. This acquaintance said, "*It feels like a collective induced coma with no clear prospect of a good outcome in the near future!*" Especially in crisis situations, we need a perspective reaching beyond the current situation. Otherwise, the opposite (i.e. lack of perspective) will start to creep in. When this happens, two things can occur. First, we can lose clarity about where we want to go. Second, we can become afraid of how long it might take to reach our distant goals. The result? We feel a loss of purpose and a lack of strength, all at a time when we're particularly challenged to work on the solution for our situation.

We need to counteract this, starting with an honest look at the initial situation, but don't stop there. The GPS system is a helpful analogy: We don't want to just locate our current position, but we also want to get to our destination. Our destination is the most important step, and everything else we do is designed to get us there.

It's crucial that we develop a perspective for ourselves that is both appealing and sustainable. That's why we should be looking at short-, medium- and long-term goals. However, the main focus has to be on creating a short-term perspective. That means setting goals just for TODAY so we don't get paralyzed by the complexity of the situation, especially in a crisis. Focus on the first things first. For example, if I'm running a business and in two weeks I don't have enough money, I will have to focus on raising capital and not on mopping the floor in my store.

But that is only one side of the coin. It's also about setting individual (partial) goals in this context, which we're able to achieve within a day. What really counts now are small successes. Headed by Prof. Teresa Amabile, a team of scientists from Harvard Business School have taken up this topic in a study and arrived at interesting results. In their research, they found that achieving daily successes allows us to experience continuous progress and thus strengthen us as individuals in the long run. The neurotransmitter dopamine is released when we hit a goal, and thus the brain is experiencing rewards. The effect: We are better able to maintain progress and are also more motivated. Thus, we create the prerequisite to achieve even our bigger goals. Behind this is a fundamental philosophy: Today is important for us – we can use it or waste it, but in any case, we have invested a day of our lives.

Goals are powerful, but only as long as they don't overwhelm us. That's why in times of crisis it's better to have a realistic goal in your everyday life than unrealistic visions of the future. People who have had to spend long periods in solitary confinement in prison can attest to this. For example, some prisoners simply made it their goal to play chess each day – but only in their head. They said that playing and winning a chess game in your mind every day can be an emotional lifeline during "everyday life" rather than constantly looking towards rescue in the distant future. Small, realistic daily goals are the antidote to aimlessness and powerlessness in difficult phases. When goals are achieved, we will experience the feeling of success, and we are able to gather energy for the next day, the next step, and the next goal. We are therefore challenged to not underestimate the importance of everyday life and the small steps and goals associated with it, especially in times of crisis. Because staying goal-oriented and motivated in phases like these is the key: **Every day needs its own success.**

## ***Three Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: Everyday Tasks Are a Success For the Spirit**

Our spirit and therefore our psyche needs success. People can actually get downright ill when they experience little or no success.

But this negative effect also allows the reverse to happen. When your psyche perceives success, this has a positive effect on us cognitively and emotionally. Interestingly enough, this doesn't only happen with big and significant successes achieved by planning well, working hard or other special achievements. Even small, mundane success stories are enough to "feed" our spirit or psyche in a positive way. Our subconscious evaluates completed tasks as success even if they are just simple everyday things.

For example, let's say someone uses a to-do list: Many people feel a special sense of satisfaction when they can cross out, cross off or check off individual items on the list. The final completion of the list either generates a deep sigh of relief or even a small, inner shout of joy. The feeling of being done is empowering no matter how small and ordinary the task. Therefore, especially in moments of crisis, we should look to gain strength through small, daily successes.

### **Tip 2: Use Rituals as a Structural Aid**

Rituals have enormous power. They give us a feeling of security and strengthen our sense of control. That's why it is worth using this tool in a specific manner even in a crisis. Rituals and routine are especially powerful in times when normality ceases to exist and everything seems to be in upheaval.

This could be daily rituals, but also how we are planning for and reflecting on the day. For example, ask yourself first thing in the morning, "What's my plan for today" In the evening, you can ask yourself, "*What successes have I achieved today?*"

Rituals can be the rungs of our daily ladder in difficult times. Rituals help us to get in and through the day. Dividing our day into segments stabilizes the soul. Therefore, it's important to define and set good rituals (e.g. regularly writing a to-do list, going for a walk after dinner, scheduling mandatory breaks, etc.).

### **Tip 3: Appreciate Small Things**

*"Human felicity is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen, as by little advantages that occur every day."* This quote by Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States, describes a fundamental principle of self-motivation. It is about the daily "reaching for happiness." Keeping an eye on the small, fortunate circumstances is a basic attitude that is reflected in appreciating even small things. This is also an essential prerequisite for the ability to experience daily successes in difficult times. In other words, if only the big things really matter, our expectations of ourselves and our goals will eventually become so big that it'll be impossible to meet them.

Furthermore, there is another powerful key in this statement: Gratitude. The more thankful we are as human beings, the more resilient we are to the storms of life, especially in crises. Observing the small daily successes and practicing gratitude are a powerful duo. They strengthen us emotionally and thus help us to keep up our strength and purpose even in times of crisis.

## ***Three Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Underestimating the Effect of Self-Reward**

Success requires rewards. Underestimating this will neglect an important factor of self-motivation. Behind the strategy of self-reward lie the laws of operant conditioning, also known as learning by success.

The mechanism of self-reward is simple and beneficial. It's about rewarding ourselves for achieving a certain goal. This doesn't need to be a big deal, but it should be pleasant and rewarding.

For example, unpleasant tasks are often put off and avoided. When we consciously provide a reward for completing such a task, this can be an important motivator for us.

The mechanism of self-reward is also helpful in difficult times. Used consciously, we can perceive even small goal achievements as daily successes by treating ourselves to a reward. There is a beautiful and easily transferable English quote for this approach: "*Put a little weekend into your week.*"

### **Trap 2: Allowing "Brooding Thoughts"**

So-called "brooding thoughts" are particularly strong energy guzzlers. They are literally negative or destructive thoughts we brood over for a long time and end up spinning in our minds forever. To minimize our loss of emotional and mental energy, break the brooding cycle. The best way is to write down the particular thought. It doesn't have to end here as we can even derive a goal from that particular thought, and aim at

accomplishing it within one day. For example, we might be brooding over the following: "*How are we going to make ends meet financially?*" This can lead to the daily goal of "creating an overview of our financial situation." This approach helps us to regain the feeling of at least being somewhat in control.

### **Trap 3: Expecting a Massive Transformation**

Big changes always begin with small successes. The health journey from a beer belly to a six-pack won't happen in one step and certainly not in a day. This is even more true for dealing with the huge effects of a crisis or a challenge. That is why it's important, especially in difficult situations, to not expect big changes overnight, but rather to establish a continuous day-by-day success process.

Major transformation is a question of perseverance, not of speed. Managing a crisis has exactly the same character. Sticking with it and getting through it are two essential factors that determine the daily approach in difficult times like these. It's an endurance marathon rather than a short distance sprint, and we want to complete the race successfully. We need success not only at the final finish line, but continuously on the way. This is what encourages us to keep going.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **How Can I Increase the Focus on Today?**

One of the simplest and best methods is a daily target journal. You only need two questions each day which should be either in two columns or on two pages:

*"What do I plan to do today?"*

*"What have I accomplished today?"*

From the questions arises the logic of handling this form of journaling. The first question should be asked either the night before or right at the start of the day, and the second at the end of the day. This brings a targeted focus for the day and provides some permanent reflection of the day's successes.

And, this has yet another interesting effect: Once we have kept a daily target journal for a while, we no longer need to fear the question, *"Was that all to it?"* The amount of small goals and their successes we are logging causes positive amazement and a sense of accomplishment, and we can look back at our overall performance as the weeks and months go on.

In addition, formalizing our goals protects against doing things for the sake of doing things. What does that mean? Especially in a crisis we feel pressure to fix everything and get everything done, which can lead to hectic, disorganized action. We lose our focus. We start many things simultaneously. We aren't focused and concentrated. We waste valuable energy and time. Formalizing our purpose, in this case writing down goals

and successes in a structured way, helps to counteract this. It ensures that we not only live through the day in a better coordinated manner, but also that we can reflect our successes more easily.

### **Why is the Focus on TODAY so Important?**

The Bible says, "*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*"

And indeed, especially in crises but also in every day challenges, one of the main difficulties can be the feeling of aimlessness and powerlessness. That is why we have to focus on TODAY. Anything else would be either just digging up the past or projecting into the future, neither of which have value for our current approach to the crisis. The only thing we can really create today is today. Pythagoras of Samos put this into a simple formula: "*Yesterday is gone - tomorrow is not here. So, live today!*"

### **How Can TODAY and TOMORROW Be Connected?**

When it comes to developing goals, there's a popular question that asks, "*How do you eat an elephant?*" The elephant is a big and possibly overwhelming challenge right in front of us. The answer to the question is of course, "*bite by bite.*" This describes the process of complexity management and the task of dividing very large plans or projects into small, manageable pieces. And that's where the answer to the question at hand is found: Especially in a crisis, we can connect the future (tomorrow) with our current actions (today). We have to name the big issues ahead of us (preferably even write them down) and then break them down into small sub-steps. We just need to make sure that the next step can actually be completed in one day.

## Your Workbook (Part 8/10)

### *Every Day Needs Its Own Success.*

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):  
*How well do I live this principle of action?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

*To what do I attribute this?*

*“The future depends on what you do today.”*  
– Mahatma Gandhi

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- Everyday Tasks Are a Success For the Spirit
- Use Rituals as a Structural Aid
- Appreciate Small Things

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Underestimating the Effect of Self-Reward
- Allowing "Brooding Thoughts"
- Expecting a Massive Transformation

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- How Can I Increase the Focus on Today?
- Why is the Focus on TODAY so Important?
- How Can TODAY and TOMORROW Be Connected?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***

*(Every Day Needs Its Own Success.).*

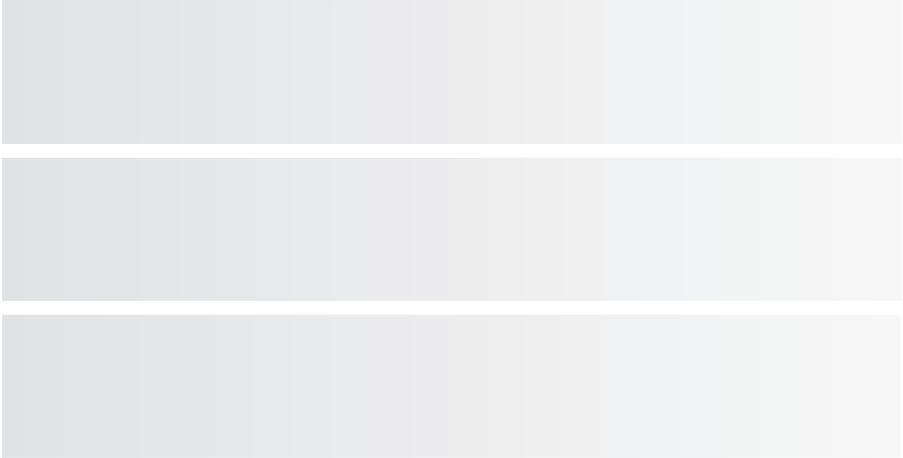
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I gain strength to carry on thanks to small moments of success.
- I value my duties and tasks and I sense a feeling of being appreciated.
- I focus on what I am achieving and can avoid demotivation.
- I am able to tackle even unpleasant issues and tasks.
- I consciously enjoy my leisure time.
- I am aware that big changes don't happen overnight so I am able to break down big goals into small sub-goals.
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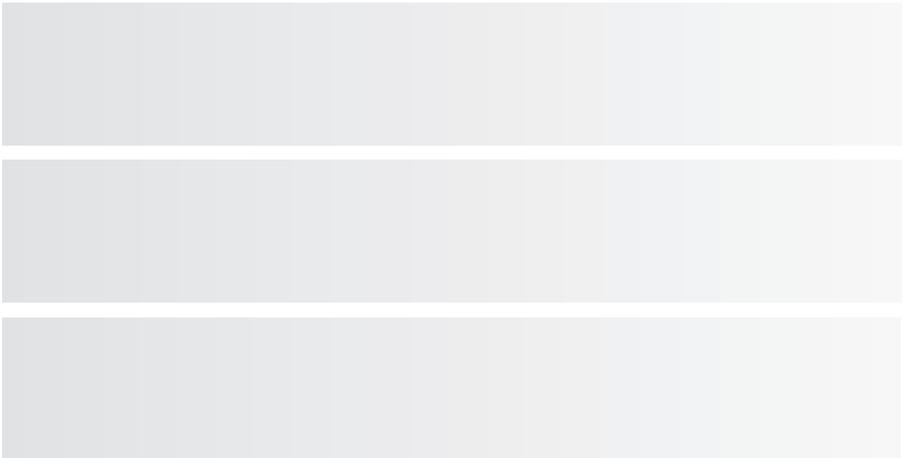
*"The aimless one suffers his fate –  
the determined one shapes it."*

– Immanuel Kant

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy when implementing the principle of action.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three biggest challenges in implementing the principle of action.

***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (Every Day Needs Its Own Success.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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7.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."*

– Lao Tzu

*Chapter 9*

**The Pressure to Have  
the Perfect Plan**

*How Do I Avoid the Pressure  
of Having to Consider Everything?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I can cope well with the fact that plans are usually thwarted by reality.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I fully accept that the future can't be determined.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I have a true sense of security even without a detailed plan for the future.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I don't mind deviating from plans if circumstances change.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

You are trying to develop a perfect plan in a crisis. This puts yourself under too much pressure and eventually you'll suffer from it.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. I divert myself from acting, and am paralyzed by a need for the perfect plan.
2. I lose sight of the goal because I HAVE to stick to the plan.
3. I don't permit myself to react to circumstances in a flexible and situational way.
4. I feel that creating detailed plans is more important to me than the actual goal.
5. I will never have a sense of security unless I have a perfect plan.
6. I am acting compulsively because my ambition dictates that I HAVE to implement the plan to the letter.
7. The urge to gather as many details as possible for my plan complicates my everyday life.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You accept that even in times of crisis, a plan can never be perfect. This takes the pressure out of having to think everything through perfectly.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I focus on what needs to be done, not just on planning.
2. I consistently focus on achieving my goals.
3. I allow myself to react to circumstances in a flexible and situational way.
4. I am able to cancel plans when they no longer make sense.
5. I have a sense of security, even without a perfect plan.
6. I don't struggle with mistakes and am able to correct them quickly.
7. I accept that it's impossible to plan the future.

## ***It's Better to Have a Good Motto Than the Perfect Plan.***

Planning is important, but it can also be distracting. In a difficult situation, our planning often turns into a proverbial wall instead of a door of opportunity. Planning works like a door as long as it gives us access to the solution of our problems. And it works like a wall when it blocks our actions. The latter happens when we claim that we **MUST** have **THE** perfect plan in order to tackle a certain issue. Our own standards suddenly turn into the main problem. It all comes down to our aspiration for perfection and correctness. But why would we even aspire to the perfect plan? It's because we aim for a sense of security. A plan gives us the "comfort" of having a framework, structure and support around a situation.

Modern research on stress shows that we feel stressed when these things are missing. Our stress levels peak when we're concerned that we don't know what's ahead of us, or don't know what's going to happen next. A plan promises to provide us with the exact answers we're seeking to feel secure and safe. But that promise doesn't hold up. If we look closer, we can see that most plans are not implemented as they were intended, regardless of how good the plan really looked. John Lennon once said, "*Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans.*"

The opposite to perfect planning is not planning at all, which is quite tempting since planning is difficult and the plan often ends up not being put into practice. However, this is not a reasonable approach, either.

In everyday life, there are no clear guidelines as to how we approach a problem effectively. This is particularly important to realize in a crisis to avoid wasting time or resources.

Therefore, the solution to this problem is a happy medium between perfect planning and a complete lack of planning. This approach is called "phasing" and describes planning based on phases. The point is to define only one or a few phases which are best captioned with a motto. It's less detailed planning, but still very effective. The key here is the motto, which is a short but striking title for each phase (e.g. "*Put your foot down!*").

In a Master's thesis at Reutlingen University, the effect of these so-called motto goals were scrutinized closely and compared against the more traditional approaches to goal setting. The result: The identification with the motto-goal is stronger, easier to remember, increases reflection (for goal attainment and self-reflection) and enables someone to further develop one's own strengths or compensate for weaknesses.

The success of motto goals and phasing is because a motto primarily appeals to us emotionally. We work with a motto goal on the level of our inner attitude and mindset, so we should define the attitude we want to adopt in a certain phase. This way, it's easier for us to connect the formulated goals with our emotions, which then leads to a better identification with our goals. Instead of giving in to the pressure of perfect planning or even going in the opposite direction of having no plan at all, this approach is the more helpful method. Phases allow us to define the direction we want to take, but they intentionally don't offer a perfectly formulated goal yet, empowering us to stay flexible.

At the same time, we're still given a certain amount of security. This allows us to invest our time and energy into active implementation, instead of wasting that time and energy on putting together detailed plans. A crisis requires both orientation and action. That's why **it's better to have a good motto than the perfect plan.**

## ***Two Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: One Word Says More than the Best Plan**

Think of the popular quote, "*A picture is worth a thousand words*". Applied to planning, this translates to, "*A word says more than the best plan.*" In fact, many people use the power that lies in just a one-word motto, be it for the whole year, a month or even just one phase. The benefit is that we can remember simple mottos better. Examples of a typical one- or two-word mottos guiding us for an entire year include "*Get Started,*" "*Freedom*" or simply "*No.*"

The decisive factor is not the word itself, but what we want to express in our current situation and, above all, what we emotionally associate with it. In any case, finding a motto is easier than striving for a perfect plan and it also reinforces our emotional focus on what we want to achieve. This is especially true when the motto isn't just a positive reminder of a desired behavior, but when it implicitly gives a negative evaluation to an undesired behavior.

### **Tip 2: Try to Identify Three Phases**

Planning by phases always works particularly well when we keep three phases in mind: The present step, the next step for progress, and the third step for your goal or outcomes.

This way we create an orientation for the acute situation, but at the same time open our eyes to the future without putting ourselves under too much pressure by striving for accuracy and completeness.

Planning the individual phases logically comprises the following elements:

**1. The present phase:** This is where we are at right now. Even if our motto is in some respects just a definition of the current situation, we have to act goal-oriented in this phase as well. Therefore, it's useful to have a motto as an inner orientation. Examples include "*Hold on*," "*Endure*," "*Sort through*," etc.

**2. The next phase for progress:** This is a key phase for our inner compass. It should show progression from the first phase, and give us the impression of moving forward. It should represent what we are striving for next, or what we see as a noticeable improvement compared to the current situation. The motto is based on phase one and usually has elements like "*implement*," "*develop*," "*promote*," etc.

**3. The future phase:** This is a more vague concept aimed at your final outcomes or goals. Here we're allowed to "dream" a little. This phase doesn't have to be as concrete and attainable as the previous ones. The motto is characterized by words such as "*optimizing*," "*harvesting*," "*achieving*," etc.

As soon as you have completed the first phase, you'll begin to ladder your phases. With progression, all phases move one step forward, so to speak, and we need to add at least one new third phase. As you complete phase one, you reorient yourself so that your current phase two and phase three become your new phase one and phase two, and you add on a new phase three. As you do so, the current phases change slightly in terms of motto and content. This isn't bad news at all but a desired effect of the method: The focus is always on the motto and not on precise planning.

## ***Three Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: The Aspiration of Perfection is Overwhelming and Paralyzing**

The aspiration of perfection can be a blessing as well as a curse. While on the one hand it compels us to strive for higher quality in everything we do, on the other hand it can overwhelm or even paralyze us. Perfectionists carry a common saying: *"If I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it right."* However, in a crisis, this can be a highly critical disruptive factor. With this dogma, we feel that we have to develop the perfect plan before we can even act. That's an unattainable ambition and thus a highly counterproductive inner attitude.

Rather than directing excessive force to the futile elaboration of the absolutely perfect plan, it would be more helpful to direct some of this energy to defining an appealing motto. This will give us the necessary emotional focus and allow us to start implementing the plan immediately instead of being overwhelmed, or freezing like a rabbit in front of a snake.

### **Trap 2: Allowing a Wrong Motto Dwell in Our Minds**

A motto gives orientation. Therefore, we should ask ourselves: What are we really focusing on? Even a small inflammation limits the performance of our body, so a motto pointing in the wrong direction causes a limitation in our thinking. There are two reasons why it's worth checking what type of motto is currently occupying our thoughts. First, it affects what we believe is the most reasonable thing to do in the current phase. Second, it goes back to the importance of those circling thoughts that we discussed earlier. For example, if Murphy's Law (*"Everything that can go wrong will go wrong"*) is constantly haunting our minds, we can end up embodying

a very negative, pessimistic world view and should definitely put a stop to this type of motto. Otherwise our inner focus will be more on what to avoid instead of what we want to achieve, and thus we aren't able to move powerfully and purposefully.

### **Trap 3: Fear of Disappointment**

There's a well-known saying, "*First, things happen differently, and secondly, more than you think.*" This applies to any form of planning. And rightly so. There are far too many factors outside our control that may affect the original plan, making the plan ultimately fail or even being impossible to carry out. That's completely normal and shouldn't be discouraging, but it can feel that way if we've set an unattainable standard for our plan – and therefore an expectation that's too high. This results in the fear of disappointment. Instead we should expect and accept that there's no perfect plan. With this in mind, the disappointment is even helpful, because it frees us from an obviously existing deception.

In this context, we often hear the phrase, "*But we planned everything so well.*" That may be true, but it's not a helpful reflection. Planning isn't the goal, because plans are simply the means to achieve the goal. And we have to leave it there. Otherwise it turns into "planning horror," which is a phrase describing the far too great demand on perfection in planning.

The result: Since extensive planning had already been conducted, it now would have to be implemented, even if it doesn't make sense anymore. Especially in a crisis, we have to make the best possible use of all our resources rather than wasting them in the realization of plans which are outdated in the meantime, just because the planning was so complex.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **How Should a Motto Be Phrased?**

Our motto doesn't have to be formulated in a particularly clever or special way. It just needs to provide a quick reminder of a value we have or a goal we're pursuing. We have three suggestions that will help in finding a motto that can provide the needed empowerment.

**1. Keep it short instead of long.** This makes it easier to remember the motto. It may even be a single word as long as it contains a statement that is important to us.

**2. Make it emotional instead of rational.** The motto should appeal to our inner attitude. This is easier and more purposeful if we don't formulate it to be too technical. So, we prefer active rather than passive. For example, "*get going*" instead of "*initiating the implementation*".

**3. Ensure simplicity.** When we are always trying to remember a complicated motto, it doesn't have a positive effect. Avoid complications and aim for a simple motto.

Finally, if we manage to add a rhyme or a wordplay, the memorability of our motto will increase significantly.

### **Shouldn't Goals Be S.M.A.R.T. Goals?**

The demand for "S.M.A.R.T." goals is widely spread in the professional world. This is based on a formula that ensures the quality of a goal by ensuring it is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.

This is a helpful approach if, for example, you want to ensure that the entire team has the same understanding of the goal. However, this approach is not always helpful for personal goal development. When it comes to personal goals, aiming for a SMART goal causes us to be overburdened as we formulate the precise goal, because personal goals are often times much clearer to us emotionally than rationally.

This is why motto goals are so beneficial. A specifically defined goal tends to be more rational, whereas a motto goal appeals much more to our emotional world. As a result, our emotional identification with the goal is significantly higher and we are more inclined to maintain our focus on it. Perseverance depends a lot on self-motivation when pursuing personal goals, and that self-motivation is much stronger when a goal appeals to our heart and not just our mind. That's why a motto combined with a target phase is a great match.

### **How Long Should Each Phase Be?**

Planning in phases has a significantly different approach than classical target definition. The question "*When is the goal going to be achieved?*" can be replaced with, "*How long do I allow the phase to last?*" There's an important difference. Our goal should have a "permitted" time frame rather than a "necessary" deadline. The effect: We exchange the pressure of "having to achieve" with the chance of "being allowed to act/do." This is particularly important in difficult times. By adding emotion to a phase with the help of a motto, we achieve desired and needed results faster.

## Your Workbook (Part 9/10)

### *It's Better to Have a Good Motto Than the Perfect Plan.*

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):

*How well do I live this principle of action?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

*To what do I attribute this?*

*“Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.”*

– Peter Marshall

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- One Word Says More than the Best Plan
- Try to Identify Three Phases

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- The Aspiration of Perfection is Overwhelming and Paralyzing
- Allowing a Wrong Motto Dwell in Our Minds
- Fear of Disappointment

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- How Should a Motto Be Phrased?
- Shouldn't Goals Be S.M.A.R.T. Goals?
- How Long Should Each Phase Be?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***

*(It's Better to Have a Good Motto Than the Perfect Plan.).*

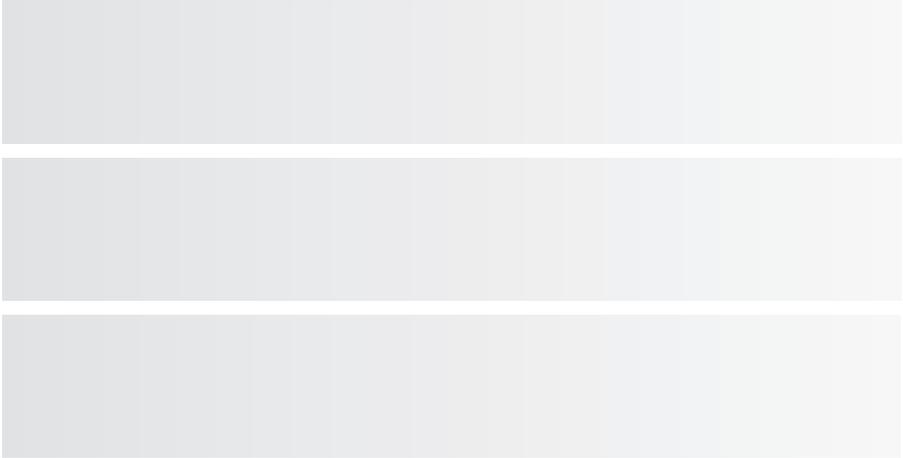
***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

- I focus on what needs to be done, not just on planning.
- I consistently focus on achieving my goals.
- I allow myself to react to circumstances in a flexible and situational way.
- I am able to cancel plans when they no longer make sense.
- I have a sense of security, even without a perfect plan.
- I don't struggle with mistakes and am able to correct them quickly.
- I accept that it's impossible to plan the future.

*"Ideals are like stars. You can't reach them,  
but you can look to them for orientation."*

– Carl Schurz

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy when implementing the principle of action.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

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***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (It's Better to Have a Good Motto Than the Perfect Plan.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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8.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"When the time comes where you could,  
the time has passed where you can."  
– Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*

*Chapter 10*

**The Drama  
of Uncertainty**

*How Do I Find Clarity for Myself,  
Even if the Future is Unclear?*

***Start With This Quick Self-Evaluation ...  
Please check the appropriate answer.***

*I can cope well with the fact that the future is uncertain in crisis situations.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I consider uncertainty a normal part of my life.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I don't have any negative connotations about uncertainty.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

*I always focus very deliberately on the next step – in any given situation.*

- 0 = not true at all
- 1 = rarely true
- 2 = moderately true
- 3 = fully true

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 0 or 1:***

You are focusing too much on the uncertain, and you may lose sight of what's possible in a crisis situation.

***7 Negative Effects:***

1. I am scared of thinking about the future.
2. I feel paralyzed with the uncertainty and about how things are supposed to go.
3. I consider the future hopeless.
4. I am easily discouraged by the duration of a crisis.
5. I start doubting myself in a crisis situation.
6. I have no vision of what I want to achieve in the future.
7. I am not able to assess the current situation correctly.

***If you answered the four self-assessment questions mainly with a 2 or 3:***

You consider uncertainty to be "normal" and you will be able to focus on the specific next steps in order to look confidently into the future.

***7 Positive Effects:***

1. I permit myself to have positive future scenarios.
2. I focus quicker on the next steps.
3. I try to shape my future in a concrete manner, even in an uncertain crisis.
4. I know that every crisis will end.
5. I can live well with the uncertainty of the future.
6. I approach the next steps very consciously.
7. I perceive a peace in spite of uncertainty.

## ***The Next Step is Always the Most Important One.***

"*The future is in the dark.*" This quote describes the common sense of uncertainty we associate with facing the future. No wonder, because uncertainty and darkness have many similarities. When we consciously choose darkness (e.g. when we turn off the lights and go to bed), we don't perceive it as dramatic or difficult, but rather as exciting, or peaceful, or desired. But when darkness comes upon us unexpectedly (e.g. a power outage or massive storm), we find it frightening. In the former, we still feel in control. In the latter, our reactions are quite different.

Do you find uncertainty unbearable? This occurs if we don't deliberately engage with uncertainty. Our inner attitude affects the way we deal with darkness, and it's also important for dealing with a crisis when uncertainty increases drastically.

In today's coronavirus pandemic, the future is obviously much more uncertain now than it has been in the past. However, there is also a second analogy in this example, which is particularly relevant in dealing with uncertainty. It lies in the two key factors: "vision" (i.e. a far-reaching look forward) and "taking steps" (i.e. a specific focus on the next action).

Let's use a delicious analogy to explain this. There are numerous restaurants around the world where diners consciously choose to eat in full darkness in order for their senses to truly appreciate the meal they're enjoying.

When it comes to "vision" and "taking steps," our overarching goal (i.e. our "vision") might be to have a special dinner at the fully dark restaurant and

later return back to the daylight outdoors. This is always in the back of our minds, but our focus remains naturally on the next step, whether that's entering the restaurant, finding a seat, or reaching for the glass. Darkness demands our full attention – which is constantly wrapped around either our current action or what we are about to do next.

Having a vision of your goal is important, and taking steps in the moment is crucial. A specific way of dealing with the future can be summed up in this simple formula, because both elements are relevant.

Uncertainty of the future shouldn't overpower us to the point of leaving us in a state of shock. Therefore, the crucial question is: "*What can I do next in specific terms?*" It's important that we start to act in a focused manner and not wait until we have absolute clarity of goals.

The fact is, the future is not clear, and this will never change. The further we look ahead, the more vague our view will be. The closer the future gets, the more precise it gets. The key is focusing on the next step.

The future might be uncertain, but our next step doesn't have to be. Is this step the right one? We can't answer this question in the moment. But is this step important? That's for sure.

Looking into an uncertain future we can either see extraordinary drama or the normality of life. The latter is useful, especially in crises, because we cannot afford shock-induced paralysis right now. We need to take action and take steps throughout the crisis. This is what counts: **The next step is always the most important one.**

## ***Three Effective Practical Tips***

### **Tip 1: Courage is the Foundation for Progress**

Uncertainty causes insecurity. Insecurity causes fear. Especially in a crisis, this process describes a sequence taking place in our minds. We're reminded of the words of Manal al-Sharif at the 8th ACADEMIA SUPERIOR Symposium. "*Fear is a reaction, courage is a decision,*" said al-Sharif, describing the inner attitude that's crucial in dealing with uncertainty. Every step into the future represents an act of action. It's an active step forward in the truest sense of what progress means. The current situation in crisis is our status quo. How we deal with it and what we do next is our "progress." Not every step will be successful, but this is a deliberate risk. Our inner attitude is essential. As Democritus said, "*Courage is at the beginning of the action, happiness is at the end.*"

### **Tip 2: With Each Step You Find Out More About the Way**

What sounds like a trivial statement is an important key in dealing with uncertainty. No matter how well we have thought things through, it remains uncertain how they will really turn out. That's why the learn-as-you-go attitude is helpful. Every step offers a gain in knowledge and a chance to learn more about the path.

Step-by-step thinking has a progressive nature. Our moving forward represents progress for us, at least in terms of gaining a new perspective on our current situation, problems and challenges. The continuous change of perspective is an important fundamental mechanism and provides the chance of finding other approaches to solutions with the help of different information.

For example, moving one step closer to a painting allows us to see more details. If we move further away, we can better see the larger context. This effect (i.e. getting a different perspective with each step) is something we need to utilize. Even if a step turns out to be a "mistake," there will be a gain in knowledge.

Thomas Edison had a clear opinion about all his failed tests and developments: "*I didn't fail. I've only found 10,000 ways that don't work.*" By taking the next step we will definitely find out more about the way, which is going to add a bit more certainty into the uncertainty.

### **Tip 3: There is No Alternative to the Next Step**

This statement is true because there is literally no such thing as non-action for us. We are always doing something. Even if we do nothing, we're actively choosing to stop or prevent an action. The question is, can we each see it that way, too? It will be crucial in dealing with our crisis or challenges.

So, the question is not if we act, but rather how we act. This will enable us to have a different inner attitude towards our activities and actions by consciously making them important. "*Whatever I do, it won't matter anyway*" is a misjudgment, as our actions always have an effect on how things will go on. Any underestimation would be negligence. It would be like giving up. "*What's your next step now?*" is a key question in therapy, in coaching and also in dealing with a crisis. It's about focusing in order to concentrate your own energy. There's a song about this in the Disney movie, Frozen 2. One of the verses starts with a question and ends with a clear, goal-oriented answer: "*What can I do? I'll go ahead and take the next step.*"

## ***Four Possible Traps During Implementation***

### **Trap 1: Being Discouraged by the Length of the Path**

In order to eliminate the intimidation of the distance in a marathon, marathon runners go by the principle that the next step is always the most important. For example, they might focus solely on the next kilometer and ignore the total distance they must still complete. After all, just the thought about the long route is distracting and fatiguing.

A crisis, including any ensuing aftermath, can take a long time to complete. Just like a marathon, we have a long distance to cover. From time to time we will ask ourselves, "*How much longer?*" Unfortunately, we can't control the crisis or its duration. But we can control how we run this race and how we simply endure it. An active form of "enduring" is to focus on the next step and taking the significance of this step seriously.

### **Trap 2: Between Wanting and Acting Lies the Beginning**

With "*Just Do It*," the American corporation Nike created a slogan that has been embedded into the normal vocabulary of many people. Typically, this slogan is used as an encouragement to the other person: "*Just do it!*" After all, our decision to start acting is unfortunately not the end of the story. Between wanting and acting lies the beginning. This is true for work projects, or New Year's resolutions, and even our journey through a crisis. A popular quote says, "*It's easier said than done.*" This brings the problem home. Especially in times of crisis, "no action" is often a poor choice. This form of paralysis creates personal stagnation, and thus regression rather than progression.

### **Trap 3: HAVING to Know and Understand**

Viewing uncertainty as a negative, leads to fear and creates self-doubt. The fact is that uncertainty is part of life, even when we aren't in a crisis. Sometimes we have a better view of what is coming. Other times we don't. The desire to know and understand puts pressure on us, overwhelms us and paralyzes us.

Accepting uncertainty as part of life enables us to live in the flow, and keeps us flexible and progressing. There will never be autonomy and freedom without uncertainty. Benjamin Franklin paraphrased it this way: *"Whoever gives up freedom to gain security will end up losing both."*

### **Trap 4: The Fear of "Endlessness"**

*"This is never going to end"* is a typical thought, especially when we are in the middle of a difficult situation. It's the expression of an understandable but unfounded fear. Why? Because everything will pass. In this world, everything is finite. Both the good (unfortunately) as well as the bad (fortunately). This "Philosophy of the Finite" removes the negativity and fear from many challenging situations and crises. Knowing that even the current difficult situation will pass can offer us hope. We might not be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but we know it will come. It helps to maintain and apply energy to the next step.

## ***Common Questions Based on Practical Experience***

### **Don't I Need a Precise Goal (i.e. a Vision) First?**

A vision has motivational power because it directs our view to the big picture and thus creates context for our thoughts and actions. If we have the basic understanding that we're involved in the construction of an important building, it naturally inspires us far more than the thought of having to work on just one brick. The work is the same, but the comprehension of the meaningfulness is completely different. Nietzsche said, "*He who has a Why to live, endures almost every How.*" This explains the power of vision. It's not so much the exact "*What,*" but above all the "*Why.*" It's less about "*What do I want to achieve?*" and more about "*Why do I want to achieve this?*" This distinction is an important key for dealing with a crisis. We may not be able to define a very clear vision; we might not be able to outline a specific picture of the future. But we may still manage to identify some form of motivational meaning to us.

The world-famous neurologist and psychiatrist Victor Frankl has extensively researched the power that lies in the "why" and has also experienced it first-hand during his long years of imprisonment in a concentration camp. His conclusion was clear: People who saw a meaning in their lives were able to survive even the most difficult emotional and psychological situations. Sometimes it's enough that the "*Why?*" is a "*For whom?*" That is, we can focus on people we love and who are important to us. The incredible power of the so-called "Trümmerfrauen" in the rebuilding of Germany after World War II confirms this even more. These were women who helped reconstruct the many cities bombed during World War II. Beyond their personal suffering, the daily struggle for survival and their own emotional and physical exhaustion, they mustered

unimaginable strength. Part of the "why" that drove them was undoubtedly a "for whom?": For their own children and perhaps also grandchildren.

Everything is meaningless in the absence of a meaning. It's important to identify this personal meaning, and to derive actions from it. But, looking ahead also requires looking at the present. Our "why" should be the impetus for understanding the next step as what it is: It is important!.

### **What if We Just Get Stuck?**

Despair is the greatest expression of the uncertainty and fear we are undergoing in a crisis. It's an overwhelming emotion that is reflected in the complete loss of hope. We feel the floor being pulled out from under our feet and we find ourselves – literally – on our knees. Interestingly, this is often the moment when despair loses its power over us. It's the moment we open up, seek support and actually accept the help of others.

There's a saying that goes, "*Misery teaches prayer.*" In the moment of despair, even people who call themselves non-religious suddenly find themselves in prayer. In a crisis, every step is better than standing still, and standing up is better than giving up. This is not intended to encourage you to do things for the sake of doing things, but a clear signal even to ourselves that we are ready to focus not downwards but forward. Luise Rinser said, "*Crises are an invitation from life to change. You don't even need to know what is going to be renewed. You just have to be ready and confident.*" Uncertainty is the darkness of the future. The question is how to bring light into that darkness. Especially in times of crisis, our possibilities are limited. Maybe we don't receive enough light to illuminate the whole way, but it should be enough for the next step, because that next step is ALWAYS the most important one.

## Your Workbook (Part 10/10)

***The Next Step is Always the Most Important One.***

On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (fully):

***How well do I live this principle of action?***

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="checkbox"/>									

***To what do I attribute this?***

*“The most important step a man can take. It's not the first one, is it?  
It's the next one. Always the next step.”*

– Dalinar

***Which tip is helpful for me?***

- Courage is the Foundation for Progress
- With Each Step You Find Out More About the Way
- There is No Alternative to the Next Step

***Which trap is critical for me?***

- Being Discouraged by the Length of the Path
- Between Wanting and Acting Lies the Beginning
- HAVING to Know and Understand
- The Fear of "Endlessness"

***Which question is relevant for me?***

- Don't I Need a Precise Goal (i.e. a Vision) First?
- What if We Just Get Stuck?

***Many positive results can come from this principle of action***  
*(The Next Step is Always the Most Important One.).*

***Which potential result would I want to work on?***

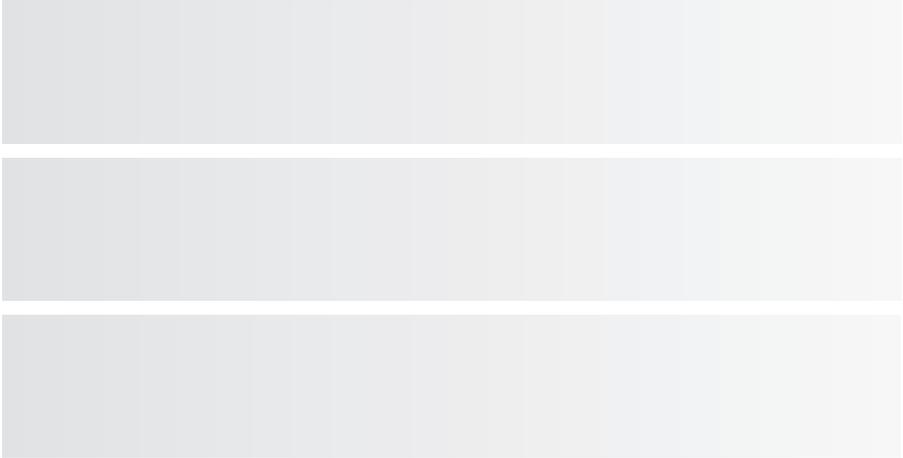
- I permit myself to have positive future scenarios.
- I focus quicker on the next steps.
- I try to shape my future in a concrete manner, even in an uncertain crisis.
- I know that every crisis will end.
- I can live well with the uncertainty of the future.
- I approach the next steps very consciously.
- I perceive a peace in spite of uncertainty.

*"Everything is going to be fine in the end.*

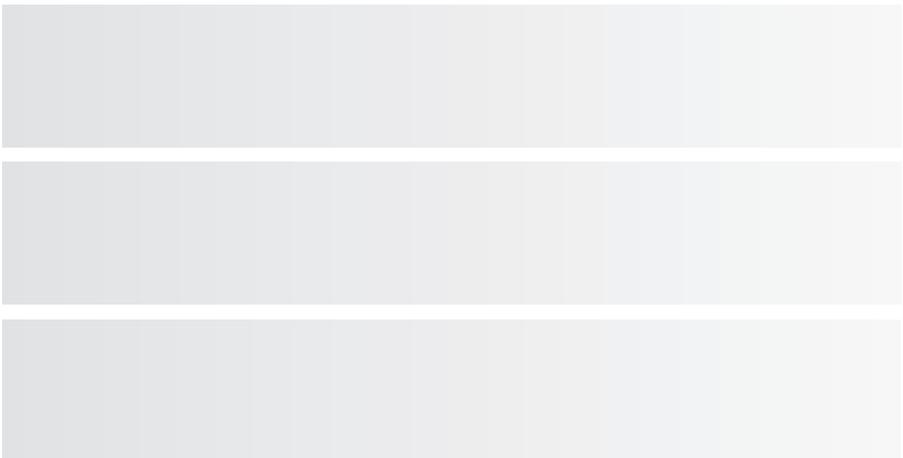
*If it's not fine it's not the end."*

– Oscar Wilde

***What are the three aspects I find particularly easy when it comes to implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three aspects found easy when implementing the principle of action.

***What are my three biggest challenges in implementing this principle of action?***

Three horizontal grey bars stacked vertically, intended for writing the three biggest challenges in implementing the principle of action.

***My personal to-do list for the principle of action***

***What do I plan for the future in order to better live the principle of action (The Next Step is Always the Most Important One.)?***

1.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Review the following in three months:**

*Which of my to-dos have I really implemented?*

*"If life has no vision you long for, there is no reason to strive."*

– Erich Fromm

### ***Some Words From Author Michael Gobran***



Achieving goals and attaining success has always been important to me, but I have been particularly impacted by crises. Navigating a crisis has taught me that the key for success always lies within our thinking. This is especially true when dealing with challenges and difficulties. The battle between powerlessness and hope, and between fear and confidence, is taking place right in our minds. That is why "MINDSET" has become my life's theme and motto. How do we establish a way of thinking that is helpful and not obstructive? How can we really make the best out of a every situation, identify opportunities for growth, and emerge from our challenges more empowered, more confident and more successful?

This book was written in early 2020 amidst the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. We can use this global crisis as an opportunity to tackle our own challenges and crises. "The Corona Effect" will provide you with inspiration, strategies and motivational support. Let this book be your practical guide in the current crisis, but also in other challenging situations you may find yourself in. However, this book's supportive effect depends on your willingness to self-reflect and to rethink your thinking. It is my hope that this book will assist you in this respect.

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