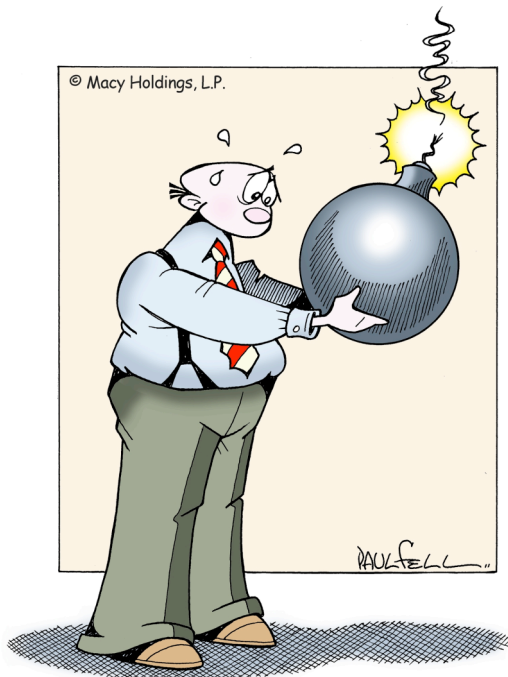


Life After Bad News

This is a time of great upheaval for many whose expectations of job security are capsizing, business owners facing bankruptcy, and for those workers experiencing disappointments that feel like a plunge into chaos.

Experience what upheavals feel like from the inside, and discover the red thread that leads through to a resolution.

I was sitting in a restaurant next to a couple whose conversation I couldn't help but overhear. They apparently hadn't seen each other for some time, and he was telling her the plight of his company. "Today and tomorrow," he told her, eyes looking far away, "about 900 people will learn that they no longer have jobs."



His empathy for the people about to be thrust out onto an overpopulated job market was so strong I could feel it at my table. But, it was the last thing he said after replaying the events leading up to his decision to terminate his business that really struck me. "Even though I've been spending most of my time with the bankruptcy lawyers, I've come to what *Plan B* will be. Sad as this time is, I have to let go and move on. *Plan B* is on a higher plane. I can feel that. I'm hooked on it, anxious to get on with it."

In the worst situations involving deep disappointments, we fear our lives will be plunged into chaos. The dictionary defines chaos as utter confusion, disorder, an abyss, a chasm. We feel that the rug has been pulled out from under us. Things taken for granted yesterday have vanished today. Financial security, daily routine, peers with whom to interact, dreams of the future...all of these may have been blotted from our picture of the future.

Chaos strips us back to our roots, causing a retreat deep into our inner selves to make sense of what has happened and what will happen now. It's a time of many questions.

This crisis feels like abandonment by the world. Suddenly I'm on the outside looking in. Why did this happen to me? What is the meaning of this? What do I do now? How will I survive? Will I make it through this?

Emotions that normally stay well below the cellar door of consciousness seep up in the aftermath of great disappointment and surprise us. Deep anger, sadness, fears...the big things that went bump in the night when we were small children...all surprise us with their intensity, emerging uninvited as the chaos continues to swirl.

Sometimes, the intensity of emotion seems like the spark that sets off a forest fire, burning timber that just minutes ago formed an eco-system of its own. And then afterwards, a singed, smoldering mountainside stands as a gaping reminder of the wound to the earth of our being.

I feel a huge sense of resentment and anger toward the person who made the decision that caused me this disappointment. I find myself heaving insults on this person. I have been wounded and treated unfairly. When I think like this, I feel my blood pressure rise, and I am all the more resentful and angry.

What I'm most afraid of is feeling the pain...not just the external situation, but feeling the feelings that are plundering me from inside.

I wish I could just get the feelings out of my mind, out of my system. Whenever I think about what happened, I try to repress the feelings. But then they, and the ones that were already back there in the storage place where I put all that kind of stuff, come up again. I don't have enough resources to keep myself protected from all those memories. My energy has run dry, and I hurt.

Chaos is a precarious time. It could go either way. We could end up in total crisis and lose it all. Or, something new could arise for us.

If we can allow ourselves to experience the confusion, the unknowingness and the emotionality that initially appear, a few scant thoughts of a different nature begin to emerge. Dreams from earlier days emerge from the closet to drift back into our minds. Relief at not having to deal with the crazy expectations of an unrealistic boss, longings to study a topic for which there never seemed time, enjoyment of simple pleasures of our family time together...many little fragments of experience offer themselves up for attention, hints perhaps at what could be brewing in the back of our minds.

What I'm starting to understand is that I have to be willing to feel all the pain of the current situation and risk that discomfort. My new path won't become apparent to me if I am stuck trying to push away the pain of this derailment. Maybe feeling it will make space for the new to show up.

I wonder what it would be like to go back to school. Oh, sure, I can't afford it right now, but I just wonder what it would be like. It's been a long time since I've wondered anything.

To stay present in the midst of chaos is an act of supreme courage. As the anchors of the past evaporate, there may be little to hold onto except our intention to make it through. The endpoint isn't any longer in sight. We may not even have the coordinates of where we're headed now, let alone a compass.

How do I find a new path when right now I feel like I'm in the ditch? If I am going to have to play twenty-questions, where do I start? If the hints lie buried within me, as the guidance books seem to indicate, where within me do I search?

If I were to stop clutching up, pulling back inside myself, if I could relax enough to notice when cues show up, what might I see? What are some of those cues? Where's my flashlight so that I can see my way into this dark space of not knowing?

The time of soaking in the questions is an entry into our deep, inner sanctuary that we may never have noticed or experienced before. It's the chaos that has led us to that opening in our own selves. From this deep place, we review a lot about our life experiences, ruminating, weighing things, making promises to ourselves about how things will be different in the future.

Let me start with what I know....what is it about the past that I care about and want to recreate? Not just the surface stuff, that's obvious enough. But, what was the value served by what I've lost? What did I miss because I was tying myself to that former path? What was the real price of my pursuing it?

If I can open up to some of these deeper queries, then maybe the energy can begin flowing again, maybe I can find a place to re-plug my battery.

It's from this place of reflection that we begin to revive. Attachments to the former pathways and circumstances wane, long-term plans may give way to plans for the next week or for just the day. We become more curious about what might show up that day and more available to the surprises when they come. We ask a lot more questions than we give answers. It's a time of both mourning what has been lost and anticipation of what may yet be unformed but coming. It's also a time for looking from a shifted vantage point.

I don't want to cave into the victim feelings that are clamoring to take possession of my mind. Giving in to that feeling of being a small child, excluded from the games the others are still playing, being on the outside looking in...all that won't help me now. Let me take a higher route now in my internal search.

What if I were to look at these unmerciful abusers as actors in a Broadway play called, "The Journey of My Life." Then they would be playing a role that is necessary for the plot. From this vantage point, they did what my greater good required in order to wake me up and cause me to think again what I'm doing with my life.

As we emerge from the chaos, a different sense of self becomes our companion. A greater self-knowing has occurred. We remember more about the dreams we had as a young person and come to have a new vision of a worthy investment of our remaining life energy. We've had a major course correction in our life path. Our grounding has broadened and deepened, and we say to ourselves, "I'll never again let myself get so lost in my attachments. From now on, I belong to myself." We come to trust our own inner GPS system.

I've learned to listen to myself – I never did that before. Not only that, but I found that my internal guidance is amazingly wise.

This crisis has tightened up my focus on what's most important to me, what I value most, how I most want to use my time and earn my living. Each day it becomes more and more clear that my time is too precious to waste. There are some things I am just not willing to put up with again!

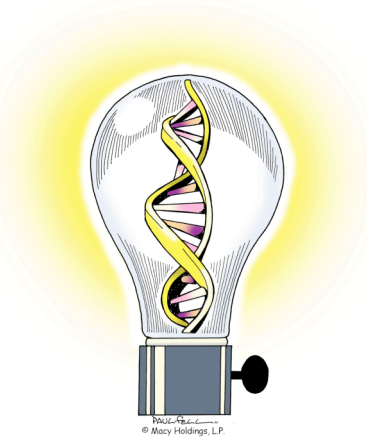
The number of pixels in my vision is increasing, and various things that I thought were important are dropping out of my life menu. They've gone from the table of contents to the index, and then with only short references.

Not unusually, when we emerge from the chaos of a deep disappointment we come to say, “Thank God that happened. I am so grateful.”

Certainty and fit have been my aims, security at all costs. I had lost the sense of adventure that comes with not-knowing. I was seeking to think my way through everything, but now I am seeing how much of my life has fallen into a venue that thinking can't penetrate. Control has been my illusion, my highest dream, yet it was illusion. Some things can't be goaled, can't be put into a spreadsheet and project managed. There are some places where science and mentality are not allowed admittance.

I've been afraid to let go and experience the ups and downs that life is, seeking to anesthetize myself so that I could blunt the blows – and, as a result, the beauties.

Thank God I have woken up. Now I feel that this crisis, as scary and potentially devastating as it still could turn out to be, also has its gifts. When I saw both sides, it was as if a light bulb came on.



Gratitude...that's what I'm feeling now, paradoxical as it sounds. There is so much for which I am in awe in this lifetime that cannot be eroded by sub-prime lending! It is to that sense of awe and gratitude that I can orient myself and restart the energy flow and my sense of relatedness with my world.

The man in the restaurant expressed it all...turmoil, fear, feelings, remembrance, wonder, gratitude. All of these are descriptors of what can be the experience resulting from deep disappointment. The red thread as evidenced by this man and the many whose experience has been synthesized here is a flow...allowing the feelings to bubble up and be experienced, raw and uncomfortable though they are; asking many questions in the sanctuary of one's inner self; and listening intently while holding space for inner guidance to emerge.

From the paradox of chaos, comes the possibility for us to turn on our own light bulb. Then we find that the chaos was a wake up call to greater illumination on our life journey.

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