



Thinking Correctly Under Pressure: Tackle your problems like the tiger!



One of the key factors influencing business success is identifying opportunities and creating and implementing a plan to achieve them. However, no matter how well you plan and organize your activities, there will be things that will go wrong. One of the most important factors of business success is having the skill required to make the right decisions. This ability to resolve concerns effectively is a key differentiating factor between achieving success or failing. But what does effective concern resolution mean? We all take actions to deal with our issues – is that not enough?

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The fight-or-flight or the fight-flight-or-freeze response (also called hyperarousal or the acute stress response) is the physiological reaction in response to a perceived threat. The same response can be applied when we are faced with business issues. We have identified some factors that threaten the success of a project. To help us to decide what action to take, we can consider the three Fs:

1. **Flight:** Run away from the concern or do nothing to change the situation
2. **Fight:** Take action, confront our issues and deal with them, or
3. **Freeze:** Take a step back and assess the situation before taking any action

To take "Flight" (run away from danger) is how we evolved in order to avoid conflict with other stronger creatures and that made a great deal of sense in prehistoric times. However, when things are not working as they should be and goals are not being met, we don't have the luxury or option of just running away from problems. Actions are required and therefore we usually move to the next option and decide to "Fight".



Fighting, however, is very rarely successful when it is just an instinctive reaction. When we are getting ready to fight, the body prepares itself by releasing powerful hormones, mainly adrenaline and cortisol. But these hormones cause changes in our body, such as increased heart rate or blood pressure, and can cause us to panic and act without thinking through the problem.

Jumping into action (or to use a common term, "firefighting") without much preparation, strategy or tactics often leads to unwanted results. More issues surface; more tasks need to be actioned; there are not enough people to action them and consequently, we lose the fight.

We usually start by facing the most pressing concern and as we are trying to deal with it, other issues appear – possibly more problems are discovered or more risks need to be managed. And the main reason is that when we got into the "fight" we did not understand the situation well enough. So what else can we do?

It's about time to consider the third F: "Freeze" the situation and assess it before we take action. Many animals that are excellent in demonstrating those instincts. In order to understand what "freezing" is, we need to think about tigers.

Have you seen what takes place in documentaries when a tiger is getting ready to defend itself or getting ready for a hunt? In both situations you will notice that there is a time period in which the tiger takes a moment to assess the situation before taking action. There is always a period when he will crouch to the ground, or stand completely still, observing the environment and gathering data. The tiger then has two options: to either flee or fight. Just by taking those extra seconds to assess the situation, he has increased his chances of survival or of getting the most successful outcome out of the situation.

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Although “freezing” seems like doing nothing, it is in reality the exact opposite. It is at that moment that the tiger’s senses are heightened, that all the information is being processed and analyzed.

So, how can we apply what nature teaches us, to deal with business concerns more effectively? The key point is that we should not deal with a hot issue in haste, but rather allow ourselves to gauge our reactions, and take some moments to assess the situation first. Spending some time assessing the facts we have and information that may be missing will give us a better understanding of the issue and the impacts and implications arising from it both now and in the future.

Situation Appraisal, a tool used by Kepner-Tregoe, is helping us do exactly that by urging us to take a step back and use a rational framework to process information. This framework provides a repeatable thinking process which allows us to process the incoming data more effectively, leading us to a successful and professional conclusion.

We start by gathering good quality data, like the tiger observing his surroundings. No matter what operating model we are using to resolve issues, the success of our plan will depend on our ability to capture the appropriate data. Obtaining the information we need will involve gathering facts on what is the specific issue (getting details and increasing our understanding) and what is the impact or effect that it is having, so that we can set the appropriate priority to the incoming concerns.

Only after getting clarity on the situation are we in a position to decide the best action to take to deal with the concern in the most effective way. This can be a problem that we need to solve, a decision that needs to be made, or an action that needs to be protected. So, knowing which course of action will be the most effective, we can then involve the people who will help us implement the plan in the most successful way.

By taking a step back and not rushing into action allow us to formulated our tactics and provides a clearer view of the plan we should follow and how best to execute it.

Next time you are faced with problems or concerns in your workplace, don’t firefight; take the time to assess the situation before you take action. Deal with your problems like the tiger...!



About Kepner-Tregoe

Kepner-Tregoe is the leader in problem-solving. For over six decades, Kepner-Tregoe has helped thousands of organizations worldwide solve millions of problems through more effective root cause analysis and decision-making skills. Kepner-Tregoe partners with organizations to significantly reduce cost and improve operational performance through problem-solving training, technology and consulting services.