

Learn the strengths and weaknesses to tame the pressure

Coping styles for managing chaos and crisis



By Carolyn Gross

Crisis management. Isn't that life in a nutshell some days!

How we respond to chaos can define and redefine us all the way through our business and personal lives. We cannot control 100 percent of the events in our lives, but we can control our reactions to them. It's during times of crisis that we get the greatest glimpses of our strengths and vulnerabilities. I like to think of chaos as the great teacher!

In 2003, after touring my first book, I began to get tired easily. Thinking it was just the added responsibilities of book promotion, I didn't give it a second thought. I awoke one night in the middle of a dream to discover a lump in my breast. It turned out to be a life-changing dream, one that put me into a new crisis I hadn't expected in my mid-forties.

The lump was malignant, Stage 3 to be exact, and I found out my coping style in a heartbeat that day. I rejected the mastectomy that was being offered and got into action to find another treatment that was less, shall we say, brutal. I discovered immunotherapy and within seven months the health crisis was over and no surgeries had been performed. I was a cancer free woman with a story to tell.

Some crisis's in life take us out of the game of life for awhile. A health crisis, a business merger that results in a lay-off, or financial hardships can all take us to the bench. As a writer and researcher, I had time to reflect on my own coping style. Through the cancer chaos with family and friends, I discovered how differently we all respond.

I was already teaching relationship programs, but this crisis had me examining coping styles and defining them from a new perspective. My recent discoveries can hopefully benefit you if you are facing a crisis right now, or when the next crisis appears. I hope to shed some light and understanding about relating to those who are involved with you, but are responding differently.

First let's look at four coping styles and how they respond to crisis. At the end of each description, we'll look at keys to relate with these coping styles that are effective and manageable.

The first coping style is Action-Jackson.

We always talk about the Action-Jackson people first — because if we don't they get upset! They rise up to the occasion when chaos strikes. They like to be on top of things.

In life their core purpose is power, so when a crisis arises, it is these leaders who immediately engage and get the ball rolling. Their shining moments are usually during critical times. They have natural talents that assist them in their action style as they are visionary thinkers who can see the necessary steps to resolving turmoil.

They often see the future before it occurs, and are brilliant problem solvers. Their communication style can be less than warm, though, because

their primary focus is productivity and connecting with other problem-solving people. When chaos strikes, they hold their insecurities tightly, so no one knows. They are the true movers and shakers. These leaders are necessary to any organization, because they confidently tackle chaos and keep growth on track

Famous Action-Jackson leaders:

Donald Trump

Martha Stewart

Henry Ford

Keys to relating to Action-Jackson people:

- Don't warm up with small talk unless they initiate it.
- If you are expressing how you feel, articulate clearly.
- When you engage, remember they like the bottom line approach.
- Always be direct, logical and specific.
- Don't wait for them to solicit your opinion; step up to the plate.
- Go out of your way to make them look good intellectually.
- Do your homework when working with them. Always be prepared with facts and figures.
- Support their decisive nature. Action-Jackson types can often make quick, accurate decisions.
- Foster their leadership instincts. If problems need to be solved, enlist them first.
- Don't embarrass them in front of others.
- Overall, they perform best when their need to be right and respected is met.

The second coping style is Adaptable Acceptor.

The Adaptable Acceptor coping style wants everyone to win. Their core purpose is people and keeping relationships intact.

Adaptable Acceptors are quality- and service-oriented. They take on a crisis with the highest moral code, and are genuine with their desire to help solve the problem. They have the people skills to work well as a team and are excellent managers.

In a crisis they stand tall and can orchestrate a situation by getting the troops on board, or keep the ducks in a row. You're heard the expression, "a true blue friend." Adaptable Acceptors fit the bill. They make the best volunteers and are a necessary asset to any organization because customer and client care comes naturally to them. When others are going through crisis, they can listen and talk about the situation all day long (and not be bored) just to keep things going smoothly.

Famous Adaptable Acceptors:

*Oprah Winfrey
Princess Diana
Walt Disney*

Keys to relating to Adaptable Acceptors:

- Promote their creative efforts and ambitions.
- Be sensitive and emphasize their security in the situation.
- Because they are more methodical than spontaneous, don't rely on last minute assignments with them.
- Allow them ample time to gather their thoughts before expressing themselves.
- Give them the opportunity to take charge; they won't always jump in.
- They prefer not to be in charge of the high risk level situations
- They are easy to approach and natural team players, but Adaptable Acceptors also have a need to be understood.
- Even if things aren't going in their direction, you can get them on board by listening to their viewpoint.
- Be sincere and loyal when you communicate with them.
- They work hard to make things work out so give them the opportunity to serve.
- Most of all, appreciate them.

The third coping style is Clarity Brings Awareness.

This person needs to view crisis and chaos from a peaceful place. They don't engage in the line-of-fire approach. They make the best listeners and can gather facts to orchestrate wise judgement calls from the sidelines or from the boardroom.

To keep their awareness intact, they value their core purpose of peace. Their natural abilities are clarity and tolerance. For this reason, they make good leaders. These people seem to be everybody's friend, so rarely do they create the chaos or crisis. They are very inventive and necessary problem solvers.

They emanate the Yoda approach: wise counsel, detached stance. It takes a lot to ruffle their feathers, so they are truly the calm in chaos. As easy going as they are, if they feel their independence being threatened watch out! They will get stubborn!

Famous Clarity Brings Awareness leaders:

*Nelson Mandela
Albert Einstein
Gandhi*

Keys to relating to Clarity Brings Awareness:

- Combine firmness with gentleness.
- They hate conflict so if you must confront them, go in with diplomacy.
- Accept, acknowledge and support their sense of individuality.
- Be patient with them; they don't make decisions quickly.
- When communicating with them, strive to be open and relaxed.
- Share ideas with them and look for non-verbal clues to discover their true feelings.
- Provide boundaries and structure for them to operate in.

- Introduce options for their involvement.
- In their presence, always react gently.
- Keep things simple.

The fourth coping style is Escape Artist.

The escape artist personality wants to keep things upbeat so when major chaos strikes, they tend to head for the hills!

After all, their natural talents are sociability and fun. When they do weather the storm, they are great because they lighten things up. They will use self-deprecating humor or be the brunt of the jokes just to get people to chill out. They won't complicate situations, but generally can't sit still too many hours in a conflict management situations without a health crisis bubbling up. They'd rather make the calamity a joke or just not face the facts at all.

If you keep them engaged in a crisis situation, they are the natural cheerleaders who display their enthusiasm and optimistic nature.

Famous Escape Artists:

*Bill Clinton
Elvis Presley
Goldie Hawn*

Keys to relating to the Escape Artist coping style:

- Adore and praise them legitimately.
- Maximize the opportunities for them to enjoy the situation.
- Invite them to add comic relief.
- Encourage their verbal self-expression.
- Remember that they are more sensitive than they appear.
- Keep them involved by making them the facilitator or summarizer.
- Take advantage of their talents. They can make great impromptu speeches and are wonderful performers under pressure.
- Reinforce trust with physical gestures, a handshake or pat on the back.
- Don't get too intense in their presence.
- Allow them freedom in their creative efforts to problem solve.
- Be positive and accept their playful teasing.

In our advanced society with a 365-day, 24/7 work world, the rate of change we live at gives us so many variables for crisis personally and globally. We spend one third of our lives building and maintaining our relationships, one third of our lives in career and financial pursuits, and one third of our lives addressing family and health.

We all need tools to get along, especially when the going gets tough. Learn what your own coping style is and help co-workers, friends and family offer the right kind of assistance when you face your next crisis.

See if you can be more observant and compassionate the next time a crisis arises by honoring action, adaptable, aware and escape coping styles. If you put in conscious effort to be flexible with others, no matter how things turn out, you'll feel better about yourself! ■

Carolyn Gross teaches people to Manage Chaos with Confidence. She is an award winning speaker, author of Staying Calm in the Midst of Chaos, a Certified Time Management Trainer for Day-Timer and professional coach.

For more information, visit www.creativelivesolutions.com or call toll free 866.246.0462.