



Accept Adversity And It Becomes A Teacher

By:
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At the office Paul didn't even pull the financial reports and calculator out of his briefcase. Joan was right: All the enthusiasm and emotional energy in the world would not turn red ink black. Instead he drew a straight line down the center of a legal pad. At the top of one column he wrote the word *Problem*. At the top of the other he wrote *Cause*.

The first problem was easy: "Insufficient money." In the "Cause" column, Paul wrote that fewer people were contributing to the school because so many competing charities had sprung up, all clamoring for the shrinking donor pie.

No, that's not true, Paul thought, scratching through the words and looking out the window at the children on the playground. *The real reason we don't have enough money is that I don't like to raise money. I'd much rather be down at the courthouse befriending a kid in trouble or coming up with plans for a new program at the school. It makes me feel mercenary to ask people for money, so I've relied for too long on the original backers. While Phyllis Nesserbaum and her type were out courting the money, I've been doing more pleasant things. And now I'm paying the price.*

ADVERSITY IS A QUIET TEACHER. YOU MUST PROBE IT FOR THE MEANING IT CONTAINS, AND INTERPRET THE SUBTLE ANSWERS WITH WHICH IT WILL RESPOND.

Paul turned back and wrote down the second problem: "Failed the bank audit." Then he set down his pen and spoke out loud. "We failed the audit because I'm so disorganized as an administrator, and because I delegated too much work to untrained volunteers without giving them adequate supervision."

Paul entered as problem number three "Not having allies in the community." *We don't have allies because I'm basically a fighter, not a bridge builder. Because I'm a pretty good fighter, there are a lot of bruised opponents out there who wouldn't mind seeing me take a fall.*

Yesterday Rafe had said that adversity is a quiet teacher; you only learn when you ask it questions. Paul was wondering what questions he should be asking this particular adversity when Ruthie stuck her head in the doorway. “Sorry to bother you, but there’s a Phyllis Nesserbaum on the phone for you. Should I tell her you’ll call her back?”

“No, I’ll take it, Ruthie. Thanks.”

Paul looked back at his list before he picked up the phone. Phyllis Nesserbaum didn’t have any of those problems because she didn’t have any of the underlying causes. Paul pictured her behind her big desk, and felt smaller than he ever had.

“Hey, Phyllis. What’s new?”

“Hello, Paul. I know this is awfully short notice, but if you don’t have lunch plans today, I wonder if we can

get together and talk about something?” Paul checked his watch—ten thirty.

“Can it wait until tomorrow? I’ve got a pretty important meeting this afternoon.”

There was a long silence, followed by a voice that didn’t sound like it belonged to someone sitting behind a big desk. “Look, Paul, I know we haven’t always seen eye to eye—you’re probably laughing at the understatement of the year. But I think we also have a lot of respect for each other; I know I do for you. I’ll level with you. I really have a problem. I need your help. I’ve got a board meeting tonight, and it would help me a lot if we could talk before then.”

Paul could hardly believe his ears. Phyllis Nesserbaum had a problem that required *his* help? This should be interesting, he thought. “Where do you want to meet?”

“How about at Franco’s, downtown?”

“Sounds good. Noon?”

“Super. I’ll see you then. And I owe you one, Paul”

“We’ll see. Take care.”

Paul cradled the phone and looked back out the window at the now-vacant playground. Then he turned back to his legal pad and drew another line downward along the right side. At the top of this newly created third column he wrote the word “Solution.” He sat for a long time staring at the page. At last he picked up his pen and in big letters filled in the new column from top to bottom with the words “GET HELP.”