UN
FEAR

Facing Change in an Era of Uncertainty

BY **KARLIN SLOAN**

KARLIN SLOAN & COMPANY

be the change.

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045
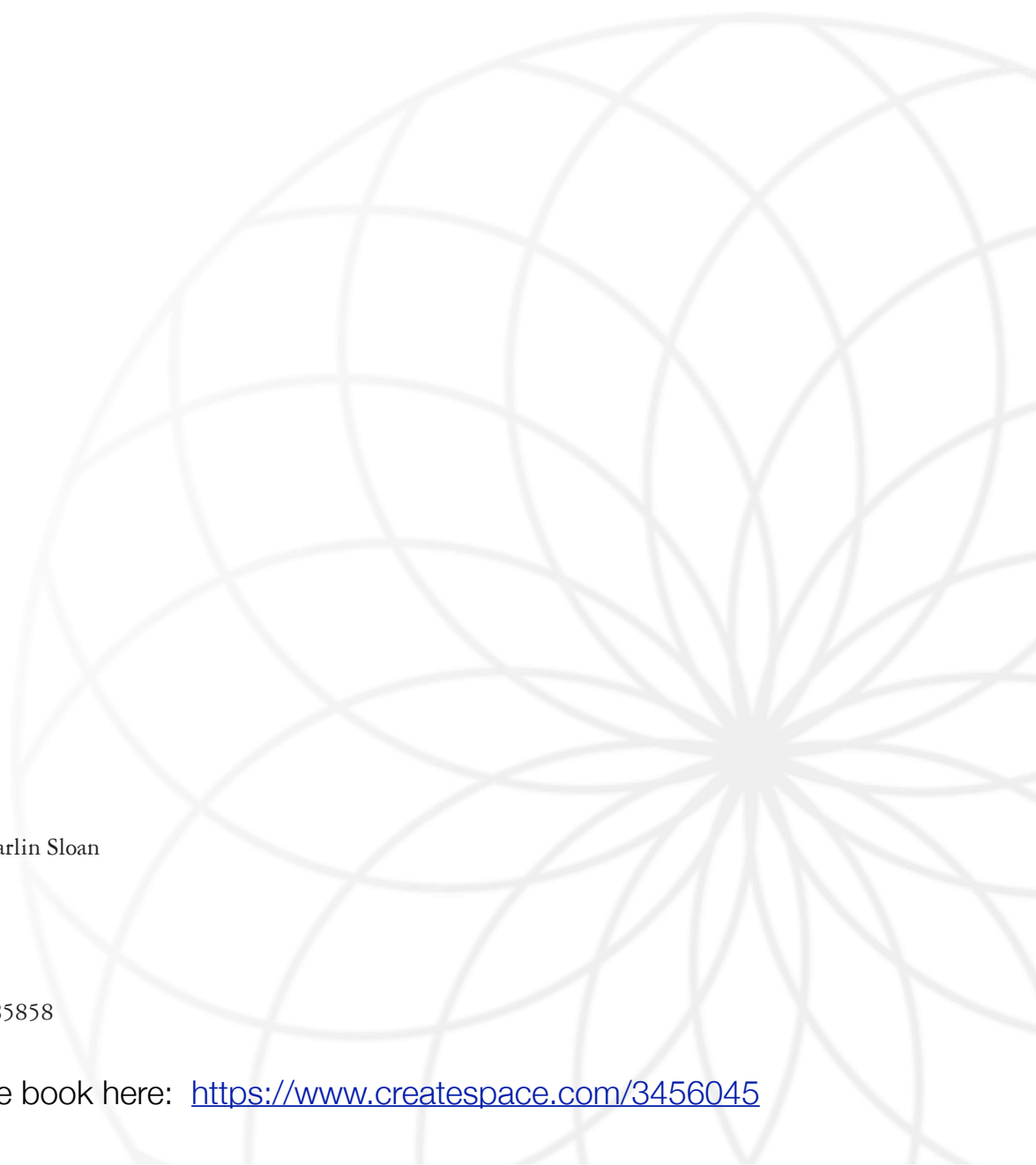
Fear is not the answer.

FEAR: \ˈfir\ to be afraid or apprehensive

UNFEAR : \ˈən-fir\ confidence in one's ability to overcome the odds, and to create a positive outcome no matter what the circumstance

Introduction

"If we don't change, we'll end up in the direction we're going."
—Chinese proverb

As a leadership development consultant, I have spent my career with people in business, NGOs, government, and not-for-profits who are focused, competent, and who have a deep sense of their personal power to impact those around them. Recently, those same people I've worked with are starting to have doubts—doubts in their ability to lead their companies through increasingly challenging economic times, doubts in their ability to protect their families and loved ones from the vulnerabilities of living in a world in ecological and social crisis, and doubts in our collective human family's ability to solve the problems facing us on a global scale. If those who would lead us are in doubt, where are we going? How are we going to effectively address immense changes as individuals, groups, organizations, and as a world community?

We have started to collectively ask new questions about business and leadership: What do we truly value? How do we measure success? How do our organizations serve a larger purpose? Our organizations, both large and small, are facing the need to adapt to rapid change that is not predictable or particularly controllable. In this context, what kind of leaders fare well, and help their organizations to survive and to contribute to the world in a positive way? It's the leaders who cultivate personal and organizational openness, adaptability, and meaning that are most needed to address current and coming shifts. It's the leaders who practice a disciplined way of thinking in the face of upheaval—they practice Unfear.

Unfear is confidence in our ability to create a positive outcome *no matter what the circumstance.*

Unfear does not mean fearless. Fearlessness can be reckless and unthinking, not taking into account the reality of a given situation or learning from our emotional response to that reality. Unfear is not courage. Courage means that there is an assumption of the negative in our future, and that we move forward despite our fear. Unfear is different. Unfear means confidence in our ability to create a positive future. Unfear is a state of openness, adaptability, and integration. Through Unfear, we can confront reality and create options, innovations, and opportunity. It is the place from which we can suspend our conclusions about outcomes, from which we can grow, change, and build.

Unfear is a state of complete possibility where we use all we've been given to actively create the world we wish to inhabit.

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

Are We in Shock?

After years of training in organizational change management, my conclusion is that we can't really "manage" the kind of rapid, complex change our world is experiencing right now. Managing has the connotation of taking control, creating a plan, moving pieces forward and parts together in linear progress. With the kind of change we are facing right now, we can plan, shift, adapt, envision, but we may have more influence than control over many of the situations in which we find ourselves.

With the constant stream of information that is coming in at all times from all sources, people who lead and manage are hit with a new level of complexity in decision-making, time management, and simple focus.

Think for a moment of Alvin Toeffler's concept of "future shock," which takes the idea that some change has become too rapid and too complex to deal with from a place of calm and rationality. The results of future shock are like a shock to the body or the nervous system; we are unable to process the information and adapt quickly enough. Daryl Conner, in his 1992 book *Managing at the Speed of Change*, had this incredible example of "future shock":

> Once, after conducting a briefing of our research findings for the White House staff, I was approached by a Pentagon official who told me that one of the ways that they were seeing future shock was in the open revolt of fighter pilots against more technology. The pilots were saying: "Don't put any more technology in the cockpit. I can't keep up with everything, and you're going to kill me." The pilots were not complaining about bad or unwanted technology, it was technology that they had asked for and even helped design. They were simply saying, "My plate is too full now. Don't bring me any more opportunities. I can't digest what I have."

If we are to pay attention to Toeffler's wisdom, we have reached the point of extensive "future shock" in our organizations worldwide. Examples you may relate to in your organization might be irritation, diverted or scattered attention, irrational or scattershot decision-making, decreased risk-taking, defensive and blaming behavior, avoidance of direct communication, and decreased team effectiveness. Those change-reactive behaviors are increasing—and rapidly.

How can our organizations, whether corporate or not-for-profit, government or local community groups, get out of shock and into collective action? How will we be able to look directly at the pressures we're under and transform ourselves to fit the world that is coming into being? The answer is Unfear.

The Beautiful Truth

The amazing possibility that lies in this incredible time of turmoil is inside each one of us. It is the possibility for true, pure transformation. When we are confronted with chaos

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

and the push to change, we have the option of seeing our world with new eyes. We have the option of asking ourselves questions that can move us to new realities: Who am I? What am I a part of? What are my gifts and talents? How can I contribute to bringing about the future that I want, rather than passively accepting a future that is handed to me? What kind of leader can I be? What is within me, waiting to be unleashed, that would come forward if I had no fear?

This is a time for leaders in organizations of all types to ask challenging questions: How will we be viable now and in the future? How can we build anew, and build the kind of culture, the kind of impact that we want to have? How will our organization contribute to a better world? What is my role in all of this, and what do I need to stand for, to fight for? What are my opportunities to use my strengths and talents to contribute?

When we stop our own mental churn, when we can tolerate ambiguity and assume that there is learning and opportunity inherent in all of our experiences, we can turn the lead of present circumstance into the gold of the future. We are starting to see the opportunity to make our work meaningful and rewarding on a level beyond our paychecks.

The beautiful truth is that organizations worldwide are changing and becoming more focused on the long term, on how they impact the environment and the community of people that buy their products, populate their offices, and live near their factories. The beautiful truth is that every day people are waking up to the idea that we can each make a difference, and when we organize ourselves into communities of contribution, we can change the world for the better. We are beginning to align the needs of humanity with the work of our organizations.

Why Do You Need This Book?

You may be looking to develop your own ability to practice Unfear, you could be leading a team in turmoil, or it may be that you're looking for a few examples of leaders who have survived and even broken through to great new thinking, through challenging circumstances. You may be going through change—asking yourself questions about who you are and what you want for the future of your work, your company, and your life. You've come to the right place.

We all go through changes at work; from the moment we're hired into a new role to the first time we have to give someone else performance feedback, we're constantly changing and developing. We also all face normal human challenges like juggling work and family, getting laid off, or even coping with illness and reinventing ourselves. We may survive a crisis on our team, be acquired, restructured, downsized, or outsourced.

In this book, we'll explore both organizational and individual Unfear, and how you can proactively engage your own capacity to let go of what is blocking you from your best work. We'll look at how to move beyond fear-based behaviors and activate confidence in yourself, your work team, and your organization no matter what the circumstance. We'll share stories, practical exercises, and inspiration.

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

Why Do WE Need This Book?

Within our organizations, we need leaders and contributors who are balanced, thoughtful, willing to take risks in telling it like it is, and acting based on what's right, not what will protect them from being fired or challenged. We need solid, engaged teams that are productive and excited about coming to work, and we need innovations that can drive us to the next level of excellence and relevance in rapidly changing times. We need the tools and capacities to get out of fright, flight, and paralysis, and to use fear wisely and consciously to inform our decisions rather than to make our decisions for us.

There's no time to lose—our world is on the brink of enormous change. As our world population explodes into numbers too enormous to imagine (from six billion now to nine billion in 2050), we are consuming resources at six times the rate of what we can regenerate. Oil reserves are dwindling, climate change is barreling toward us with unthinkable consequences. Food riots have begun around the world because of global shortages of staple crops. Forty percent of land-based species are threatened within thirty to fifty years, depending upon whom you listen to, and both natural and man-made disasters are affecting more and more people. How are our businesses going to cope with rapid change in materials availability, consumer demand, safety and security issues, and a truly global economy?

This book addresses the specific needs and desires of a new generation of leaders and organizational citizens who need to think on their feet and use their wits and street smarts, to use everything they've got in order to make their companies, and their world, a better place to be.

So what is the "perfect storm" of realities that are exponentially accelerating the change in our organizations and our lives? They include:

- Economic globalization and interdependence
- Instantaneous communication of information
- Exponentially increasing world population
- Change in climate, weather patterns, and environment
- Rapid destruction of natural resources and ecosystems

And a very important one we don't always talk about:

- The survival needs of our organizations are not always aligned with our survival needs as a species.

As a community of corporate citizens, entrepreneurs, not-for-profit leaders, politicians, and others, we have an opportunity to come to the collective table to address our individual and global challenges with Unfear. We need to take into account all that has happened until now without reacting from fear and desperation, and without fearlessness and recklessness. We need new standards for our own leadership; we need to look at the big societal picture,

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

focus on ethics and values, know that our actions have a powerful impact, and strive for that impact to be positive rather than negative.

Our world needs us to come together with a new view of possibility, with openness and creativity, and with the will to change—not just to adapt to what is, but to create what might be. It is time for us to become globally aware, to acknowledge the tremendous challenges that we are faced with as a human civilization, and to see the opportunities inherent in our individual and organizational lives to improve our collective circumstances. We need to recognize the great gifts we've been given—our own glorious, unique attributes and abilities that the world needs now—and we need to give those gifts to the world. There is no time like the present, and no one better positioned to transform yourself and the world than you.

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

Chapter 1: From Fear to Unfear

When we operate in a state of fear, we shut down our best thinking and operate from reactivity to immediate danger. If we stay in that state of fear, we are consistently training our brains *out* of our best thinking.

Think about your work environment.

Is it a place where people are concerned for their jobs, where they are uncomfortable with or distrustful of feedback, where there is a consistent background state of anxiety? OR, is it a place you are excited to go to, where new ideas are cultivated, where there is a sense of possibility and promise, and where you are unafraid to express yourself, to ask questions, or to come up with new ways of working?

Most of our organizations are a bit of both, and during times of stress and challenge—and dare I say future shock—they can shift toward fear ruling their behavior and decisions. Fight, flight, and freeze are the three fear-based behaviors that stop us from making good decisions, acting from the best part of ourselves. They are also what get organizations in trouble.

Remember, Unfear is confidence in our ability to create a positive outcome no matter what the circumstance, and it takes getting ourselves out of survival mode. You may remember from back in some Psychology 101 class the idea of Maslow's hierarchy of needs[1]. It's pretty simple:
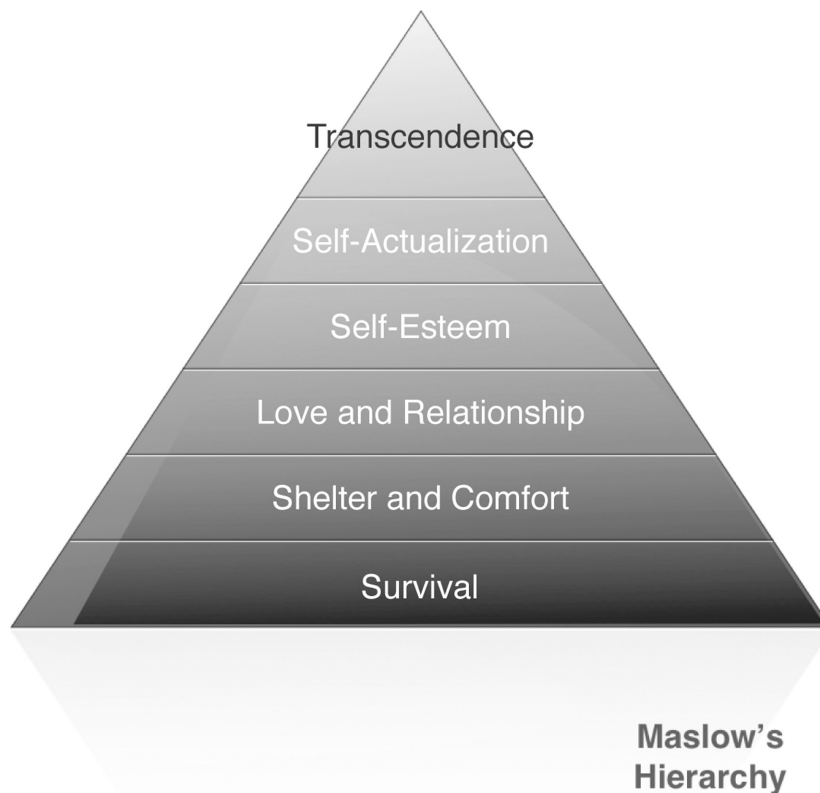
Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs starts at the bottom with survival. That is our first, most basic need. If we don't have food, water, air, and our other physical survival needs met, that becomes our complete focus.

As we move up the ladder, we get to more sophisticated needs. Once we have shelter covered, we can move to getting our emotional needs met through love and connection to others. Beyond that, we have the basic human need for respect—from others and from ourselves (self-esteem).

At the top of the pyramid are two more areas. One is self-actualization. This is described by Maslow's student Dr. Wayne Dyer as "to be free of the good opinion of others" and "to do things not simply for the outcomes but because it's the reason you are here on earth."[2] Self-actualization is the point at which we connect to purpose and meaning beyond our own physical and emotional needs.

---

1   A.H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation", *Psychological Review* 50(4) (1943):370-96
2   Hay House's "I Can Do It!" 2009 conference in Tampa, Florida, released in theaters as *Wishes Fulfilled*

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

Transcendence

Self-Actualization

Self-Esteem

Love and Relationship

Shelter and Comfort

Survival

**Maslow's
Hierarchy**

The final category was created at the end of Maslow's life, and that category is one he felt had been missing: transcendence. That final category transcends all of these human needs. When we transcend, we give back to the world without the need for our own gain.

Why is this model useful when we look to create Unfear in our organizations? Because so many of us *revert* to survival-level behaviors in the face of fear, even when, in reality, those needs are covered. When we are worried about survival, we don't have the capacity to connect to higher-level behaviors like searching for meaning, giving to others, and contributing our gifts and talents in a positive way. Instead, we become self-focused and fearful. To create Unfear, leaders need to move people up the ladder from the basics to the very top.

If you're reading this book, chances are you have your survival needs taken care of. That doesn't mean you don't *feel* like you're in survival mode. These sometimes-unconscious responses to our outside environment can shape our behavior, our beliefs, and our outcomes in unhelpful ways.

Fear is useful when you're at that bottom level of the Maslow pyramid. Without fear, we couldn't survive. We need to be able to activate that fight or flight instinct in times of immediate physical danger. It's not as useful when we are beyond that immediate moment of life-or-death peril.

How do you know if you're living in a state of fear versus Unfear?

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

TRY THIS
Identify Your Own "Being State" at Work

Take a moment to think about how much of your time you spend in each of these columns. Think of how much time you see others at work spend in each of these columns.

Fear	Unfear
Worry about what's next/ what's coming	Confident that whatever happens you will make it through
Shying away from action	Taking empowered action
Feeling negative or pessimistic about the future	Feeling positive or opimistic about the future
Disconnecting from others	Reaching out to build relationships
Tolerating chaos	Practicing discipline
Focusing on survival issues	Focusing on self-esteem, self actualization, or transcendence

In organizations, fear can shut down the productivity and effectiveness of a team. In 2009, during a very challenging time for many organizations, Tonia found herself at her wit's end. After a second round of layoffs, her team was fragmented, unproductive, and focused on what might happen next rather than on getting the job done. Two very popular team members had been let go, and she had taken on extra hours, as had three others on the team who were attempting to do more with less. She started to notice that when the team came together for weekly meetings, instead of being their normal lively and challenging selves, they were completely silent, waiting for her to speak and tell them what was next. They were afraid of more layoffs, of losing their jobs, and of asking for support or assistance to get the job done. As a leader, what was Tonia to do with this? They were too fearful to talk openly about any problems they were having, and she was not sure if they would meet their targets for the quarter. When she challenged them, or confronted their fearful behavior, she got a wall of stony silence. No one would risk the honesty required to tell her that they were in deep trouble. Does this situation sound familiar?

Besides being so important for teams to address fear-based behavior, Unfear is also critical for us as individuals. When we focus on our survival instead of on higher-order issues, we can get ourselves in a boatload of trouble. Laurent, an operations executive in a large consumer products company, had been letting fear get the best of him for six months. After returning from a long stint in South America as the head of a division, he was having trouble integrating back into U.S. culture. He had been very popular in Brazil, particularly with the team he led so well. Unfortunately, back at the home office in the U.S., Laurent had alienated some of the senior management team by not communicating enough, not paying attention to politics, and not aligning himself with anyone above him. He was

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

told there wasn't a permanent role for him in the U.S. organization after his assignment was complete, and he was asked to wait and take on a role doing "special projects" for the COO. Laurent was depleted and felt slighted by being relegated to special projects. He started working on an audit of facilities in the regions, but he said no to running a large technology implementation because it was housed in the HR function, and he felt that the power players in the organization wouldn't see his value if he aligned with HR. He asked to please be considered for another position in Latin America or Europe.

In the meantime, Laurent's self-criticism started to grow. He second-guessed himself. He started behaving erratically, snapping at his coworkers, and criticizing how his successor in Brazil was managing. If only he had behaved differently with his leadership team. If only he had watched all the politics and paid more attention. If only he had really promoted himself in the organization rather than his team. Laurent's internal condemnation was at an all-time high when we met for the first time. "I've ruined my career," Laurent said, "if I lose this job, I'll lose my family."

Whoa! That's quite a leap! Laurent's fear had done a number on him. First, he was making decisions that were sabotaging his success in the organization. His stress levels were sky-high, and that stress was driving emotional, self-sabotaging behaviors. The COO felt the tech implementation was of critical importance to the company but, because of Laurent's fear of being perceived badly, he said no. His fear-based thinking was working against him by attacking his very belief in himself. He was starting to come up with disastrous assumptions about his future, and his actions were in accordance with his beliefs. At home, his wife was terrified that Laurent was going to lose his job and angry that he wasn't focusing on his two young children more. At work, his boss was disappointed in Laurent's lack of engagement and concerned that he wasn't being a team player. What a setup for failure!

There are two ways we can deal with fear. The negative way is to react to fear unconsciously, letting it drive our behavior in ways that don't serve us. Think of Laurent and how fear drove his actions in ways that didn't work, and sabotaged his career. The positive way is to understand fear for its value. Fear's aim is survival! In a situation of physical life and death, fear can move us out of the way of a falling object, or get us to run from a hungry animal. It can stop us from moving when that could hurt us, and can alert our body to gear up to fight when we need to defend ourselves. All fears are operating for a reason. Fear possesses positive intent.

In business, those instantaneous responses to fear are not usually that useful. In fact, fight, flight, and paralysis are often the worst ways to react to work situations and can get in the way of all of our best thinking and action. Laurent had gotten himself into a fear-based trap. We developed a new goal: for Laurent to act from a new state...a state of Unfear. He opted to look at the past analytically in order to learn from it, and to face the future with a sense of possibility.

Laurent began by looking at the reality of his situation. He'd made some mistakes, and he needed a new plan. He came up with a proposal for a new special research project to determine if there was an opportunity in an emerging market in Latin America. He made the case that his extensive experience in Brazil would mean greater awareness of cultural

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

issues. He was proactive, positive, and when he spoke with the COO he advocated for himself, and for the opportunity he saw in this new role.

He's still working on it, but through that shift, he became aware of how his fear was sabotaging him personally, and how it was sabotaging what was best for his organization.

The Four Practices of Unfear

What are we to do with these ever-increasing symptoms of future shock, with our increasing fear of the future? We need to bring out our amazing human capacity to be thoughtful and conscious before we act; we must cultivate our ability to operate from a state of Unfear.

Leaders who succeed in rapid change use the four practices that engage Unfear:

1. Accepting what is, and focusing on the future
2. Building relationships and community
3. Viewing challenges as opportunities
4. Practicing physical and mental discipline

As you read the stories of leaders and their organizations overcoming obstacles, dealing with tough times, managing growth or expansion, coming out of a bad situation, or discovering exciting new ways to do things, you'll see these same four practices over and over again.

One of my favorite examples of Unfear in the face of seemingly unending adversity is in the leadership of Ernest Shackleton, Antarctic explorer, and the journey of his ship, the *Endurance*. If you're feeling sorry for yourself right now, put yourself in Shackleton's shoes! In December of 1914, Shackleton's crew set out to traverse the Antarctic continent as one of the last frontiers of the golden age of exploration. On January 19, 1915, their ship was frozen in pack ice, never to sail again. Known to his men as "the boss," Shackleton engaged the men in constant activities, both work and play, as they camped on the ice, waiting for the coming thaw. He encouraged unity on his team by making everyone equal by removing all rank, and giving them a new, shared mission: keeping every man alive. With every catastrophic event, from being stranded on the ice to losing the ship, and, later, having to sacrifice their beloved sled dogs to sate their hunger, the men of the *Endurance* were buoyed by Shackleton, who kept a focus on the future and looked for solutions at every turn. When the thaw came and the ice began to break up, the crew set out in three lifeboats, carrying nearly nothing with them, to find dry land. After five days at sea in temperatures of minus-twenty degrees Fahrenheit (-30° C), they reached Elephant Island, a desolate place inhabited predominantly by penguins. It was soon clear that there was no chance of rescue. The crew patched together one of the three lifeboats, the *James Caird*, and Shackleton and five other men set out across the roughest ocean in the world (in hurricane conditions, no less) to find the nearest whaling station at South Georgia Island. Upon reaching their destination, three of the men took on the challenge of traversing a vast expanse of glaciers and crossing the

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045

island to reach the whaling station. After thirty-six hours, they reached their goal. Stopped from immediately rescuing his men by sea ice, Shackleton finally reached Elephant Island with a tug four months later and rescued every single member of the *Endurance* crew. [3]

Shackleton's ability to accept the real, focus on the positive future, build relationships and community, and view challenges as opportunities enabled his crew to survive. He took the circumstances they were in and never gave in to believing in a terrible future. He kept the faith, and helped his crew to develop constant physical and mental discipline that helped them stay alive no matter what happened.

Just as Shackleton led his team through difficult circumstances, our business leaders today must face enormous challenge and unprecedented change. While we may not be trapped in a sea of ice, we may face issues we've not even imagined, and when we're in charge it's up to us to keep ourselves and our teams rallied to meet whatever lies before us.

How do we develop these marvelous abilities to accept the real, focus on the future, build relationships and community, and view challenges as opportunities? We must reorient ourselves to developing our strengths and to seeing possibilities in what's before us, no matter how difficult.

The Strengths Revolution

There is a revolution happening in our organizations, and it is a revolution of strengths. Voices like those of Martin Seligman, Marcus Buckingham, David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, Fred Luthans, and Kim Cameron are publicly declaring a new worldview in organizational life. I am proud to say my organization has been a part of that strengths revolution for the last nine years, and that every day that we help another leader to engage their best thinking, make clear decisions, communicate effectively, build their team's capacity, or get out of reactive, fear-based behavior, I am satisfied we are helping to bring about the possibility of a positive future.

The strengths revolution is not about a "Pollyanna" worldview that looks only at the positive to the exclusion of all else; it is the development of a new balance. We are naturally trained to use our critical thinking and skills of discernment to find and solve problems. We are naturally trained to use our "critical eye" to view what's ahead. To address an intense barrage of change and complexity, we need a new dose of optimism and commitment to searching for and building the good. That perspective, that "appreciative eye," is critical for our finding new possibilities and building new options, new futures. What we focus on becomes our reality, and when we focus on weaknesses and threats, without focusing equally on strengths and opportunities, we go out of balance and start amplifying our reactivity to fear. The organizations that fail are often those that stay reactive and fearful of change, be it from market conditions, competition, or a fragmented and disengaged workforce.

The best and most exciting organizations are those that focus on creating a positive future and work toward that future. They engage both the minds and

---

3   Carline Alexander, *The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition*, Knopf, 1998

hearts of their employees because there is a shared sense of achievement and a promise of creating something positive together.

These attributes of accepting the real, focusing on the future, building relationships and community, viewing challenges as opportunities, and practicing physical and mental discipline are not new, but they provide us with a much-needed formula to help us step away from future shock and back into strength and empowerment in the face of change.

Fear Versus Unfear in Organizations

What happens when we experience future shock on a large organizational scale?

We stop thinking clearly and start operating based on faulty assumptions. We forget the incredible interconnections and interdependence in our global economy and in our environment. We miss important details and scramble to get things done rather than thinking.

So now we come to the terrible and fearful story of mortgaged-backed securities and the demise of a trusted institution: Lehman Brothers. And it doesn't start where you think it does.

According to David Marshall, vice president of financial markets at the Federal Reserve Bank in Chicago, we can learn from the financial crisis of 2008, particularly about planning and preparing for crises and the unknown (the opinions expressed by Dr. Marshall are his own and do not reflect positions of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago or the Federal Reserve System).

> I'm an economist. Economists like simple models, and the basic story that makes sense to me is that the impetus for this financial crisis goes all the way back to the demise of socialism. Communist socialism in China, democratic in India. Vast increases in productivity, vast increases in GDP per capita were the result, but what were they going to do with this income? A disproportionately large amount was saved. Completely rational, the right thing to do. They saved more than Americans, Europeans, and Japanese because they had poorly developed financial and insurance markets. It was harder to use institutions to hedge against risks. They ended up saving a huge amount. At the time, this became important—the early part of this decade, it was natural that the place to invest was the U.S. capital markets. A huge flow of funds goes into the U.S. capital markets. This was exacerbated by producing for the export market—the U.S. combines biggest capital markets with the biggest number of consumers ready to purchase exported goods. Approximately 6.5 percent of the U.S. GDP was coming from these developing markets. A huge amount of money had to be absorbed. Securities were created in exchange for the money. Securities are basically securitized capital. A disproportionate amount of the flow of funds was created by securitizing residential capital—mortgage-backed securities. A huge amount of funds flow into the mortgage markets. Like anything, when you're trying to ramp up production fast, it's inefficient. Costs go up, efficiencies go down. The quality of the product goes down, and that's what was happening to the mortgages that were being sold.

Buy the book here: https://www.createspace.com/3456045