



Your Circumstances – Problems or Opportunities?

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When you think about what works well in your organization, what comes to mind? Are you most proud of your ongoing product innovation, top-quality customer service, or harmonious teamwork? How about what doesn't work so well? Is it your slow approval processes, lack of sense of urgency, or inability to obtain higher margins? You can undoubtedly create a list of what you like as well as what you don't like about your organization.

What if one list contained many more characteristics than the other? Would it mean that your workplace is really good or really bad? Or would it be more of a reflection of how you think? Would a significantly larger list of positive attributes mean that you tend to see situations positively? Or would a long list of negative attributes indicate that you are an innate pessimist?

How you see the world is a result of two factors—your circumstances and how you interpret your circumstances. There may be a person you work with who by objective measures lacks interpersonal communication skills, yet you can choose to see the person as an opportunity to coach or someone who is a drag on the whole organization. The dichotomy in these perspectives is due to you—not the circumstance. Because you choose how you interpret your circumstances, you choose to see your circumstances as either positive or negative. You choose to see them as problems or opportunities.

This is not to say that you don't encounter situations that could legitimately be called problems. There are customer complaints, employee mistakes, and traffic delays. There are family conflicts, health matters, and troubling world events. Yet even these problems can be reframed as opportunities.

I'll never forget a summer day in 2007 before the start of the Great Recession. I had recently finished a five-year long project of building our executive retreat in Colorado (www.AlpineVillaRetreat.com). The prior five years had been a blur of managing construction sub-contractors while simultaneously building my consulting business. Finally I felt that I could relax a bit and enjoy some free time. The economy, however, had different plans. It was on this day that a confluence of bad news occurred. Home construction was falling, financial institutions were losing their liquidity, the stock market was swinging wildly, and I realized the overall economy was on the brink of a significant downturn. It struck me that I could get into real financial difficulty. My two small companies both depended on discretionary spending. If companies cut back, both of my businesses would suffer. Was this a problem or an opportunity?

Instinctively, I first saw this coming downturn as a problem. However, not being one to wallow in unfortunate circumstances, I decided to reframe it as an opportunity. I turned my attention to finding ways to better differentiate myself. I conceived and implemented several ideas, but the one that stands above the others was my decision to author a book.

Writing my first book took a couple of years. It was a significant investment in time, but when completed in 2009 established my credibility as a thought leader on coaching, change, and self-improvement. It created numerous new speaking and coaching opportunities. I also learned how to write which paved the way for my most recent publishing venture. Becoming an author was a critical accomplishment that would not have occurred had the economy not turned downward. Had my businesses not faced difficulty, I may have merely done what I had always been doing.

So was the great recession a problem or opportunity? It turned out to be an opportunity for me because I chose to do something positive with it. I have many customers who claim the same. How about you? Did you leverage the downturn to the extent you could? How about now? Do you currently see your circumstances as problems or opportunities? Do you consider yourself a victim of unfortunate circumstances or an opportunist who can turn your lemon into lemonade? What might you do now to turn your problems into opportunities?



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The choice is yours. When you think about your organization, family, or other parts of life, are you dwelling on your frustrations or focusing your energy on doing something about them? Choose the latter and achieve something worthwhile. Think like Charles R. Swindoll who said “Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.”

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com) and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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