

Strategy Number One: Broaden the Context

It's common for all of us to take disruptions personally. After all, we're the ones directly affected by the organizational downsizing, hiring freeze, or cuts in spending. Closer to home, we're the ones dealing with the poor health of a loved one or the fact that too many young people can't find good-paying jobs after graduating from college. It's only natural that we see these events as singular and significant to us.

It's the same with organizations. The volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in the marketplace may be affecting others, but it's quite personal when it's happening to your organization.

True enough. But we need to put all of this into a broader context. It's important to view what's happening

from the perspective of history. We need to understand what others have done when they've faced similar adverse circumstances in their lives. In fact, people who reflect more on their past during stressful circumstances rebound more quickly and are much more likely to deal effectively with their circumstances than those who don't.¹

The first thing you have to do to turn adversity into opportunity is to put all these challenges into a broader context. You have to get people to see that they too can overcome the difficulties of today and tomorrow, much as others did before them. It may not be easy, but it has been done before and will be done again. Adversities can be overcome.

Leaders and constituents alike have faced turbulence and difficulties in the past, and they've not only survived but thrived. It's true of historically admired leaders, and it's true of today's everyday leaders. It's true for others, and it's true for you. Challenge, adversity, uncertainty, ambiguity, volatility, and complexity are not partial to an individual, an organization, or a period in history. These conditions have been with us for as long as human history, and you can count on them to be there for future generations.

Consider what DeLisle Worrell, governor of the Central Bank of Barbados, is doing. In a recent talk with many of the country's leaders, DeLisle broadened the context when discussing the challenges of reviving economic growth in his country. He provided perspective by reminding his colleagues that the country has faced similar and even more dramatic challenges in the past, and then showed not only how they have been overcome but also how rebounding from these challenges built the basis for substantive future growth. Research supports DeLisle's approach, finding that resilience is enhanced when people are able to share positive stories about handling past hardships.²

Ask yourself and other people you're working with:

- What's the bigger picture here?
- How can we help people understand what's happening in the broader environment and how it's affecting our business?
- How can we educate others about the larger context?
- How can we get people to see that we're not any worse off than others were before us?

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- How do we give people time and space to discuss their answers and gain perspective?
- What can we do to frame what is happening and being done in ways that give people hope?

Putting things into perspective is vital to transforming adversity into opportunity.